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NO. 223



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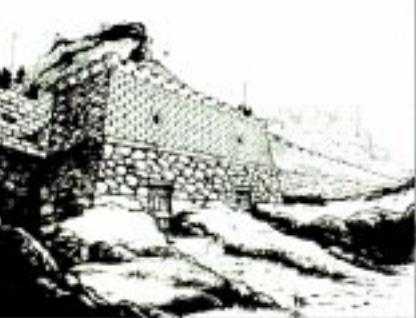
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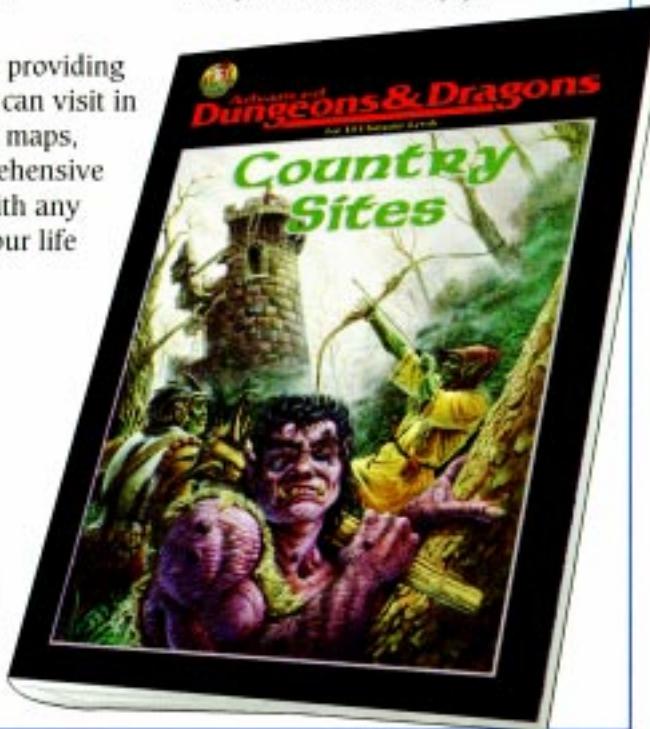
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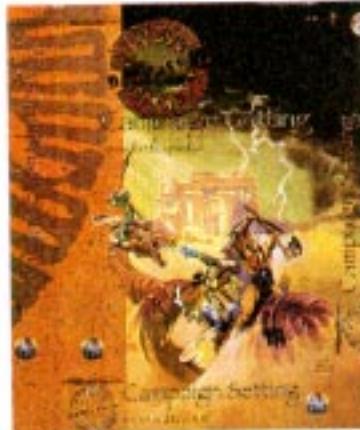
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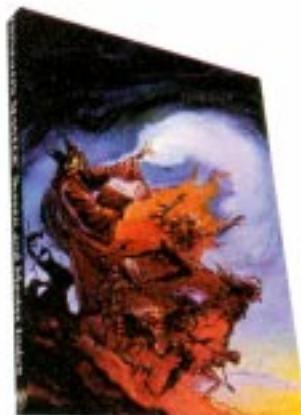
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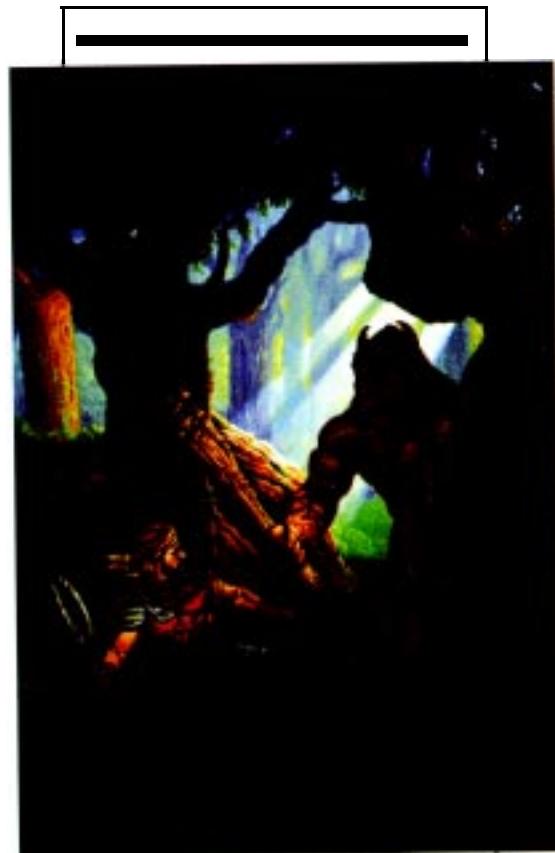
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COVER

Our cover this month is by former TSR staff designer Roy Parker. Painted originally as an interior piece for an article that never made it to press, it works very well representing our beastly theme. We haven't forgotten the painting (or Roy) and are pleased to present it as this month's cover. "Help! I'm fell and I can't get up."

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Athas 2.0 ?

Dear Dragon,

It is with great fear that I read your article in DRAGON® Magazine #220 about the re-release of the DARK SUN® campaign. I'm ashamed to say that I was officially duped. I am the not-so-proud owner of four soon-to-be out-of-date products.

In an effort to spice up our gaming sessions, I recently purchased the DARK SUN boxed set, the *Dragon Kings* supplement, the *Elves of Athas*, and the *Complete Psionicist's Handbook*. I am most upset that three of these four items will now be of limited use. At the very least, I'll probably have to purchase the new boxed set when it comes out in a few months. My players get a free guide just because mine will be superseded.

Why don't we ever get a break on a new release if we already purchased the old one? Most of the computer software companies will notify in advance of a new release and will offer a discount if you upgrade.

Are you planning to update the entire series of DARK SUN products? I understand that the fictional works associated with the product line have promulgated some of these changes. I am very glad I held off buying the *Thri-keen* and *Silt Sea* supplements.

I hope this letter doesn't sound cranky; I'm a big fan of the vast majority of your products. I love the new PLAYER'S OPTION rules to assist in character generation, and FORGOTTEN REALMS® is great. One of my players just purchased BIRTHRIGHTS™ and we're still puzzling our way through.

Tim E. Taylor
Midland, MI

I can relate to the frustration, but the software analogy is actually an anomaly. Take another common item purchased and updated: the automobile. If you buy a 1995 Corvette, you can't expect them to give you a discount when the 1996 model comes out. As to the advance notice of version updates, well, you got one, in DRAGON Magazine #220. The new version is out in November.

As to the viability of your purchases, consider them all valid. We've added to Athas, that's all.

Whither Krynn ?

Dear Dragon,

Recently I've noticed a dramatic drop in the number of DRAGONLANCE® products and I can't understand why. Why is there this drop in product and publicity? I personally think that DRAGONLANCE is one of your most exciting game settings and I would hate to see it flushed by TSR.

Mike Lassen
FPO AP

*Have no fear, Mike. Not only is DRAGONLANCE very much alive, TSR plans some very exciting changes and new things in the near future. There is nothing I can really tell you now (without getting in big trouble with the DRAGONLANCE design team for spilling the beans), but I can say that 1996 will be a special year for the series. For now, as a hint, may I suggest you run to the nearest bookstore and get the latest DRAGONLANCE novel (a November release), *Dragons of Summer Flame*, by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis? It will give you an idea of what's in store...*

Book 'em, Dano.

Dear Dragon,

I greatly enjoy your magazine. I have been using it as an aid for some years. I also love the stories; is there a chance of a book of all the best stories printed in DRAGON Magazine?

Andy Hand
Gardner, IL

Gee, thanks. Every now and then a little egoboo is a good thing. As for an anthology of some of the best DRAGON Magazine stories, I don't know. We'd have to reacquire rights from the authors to reprint them in an anthology, but if there is enough support, maybe we'll look into it. Hint, hint...

More TSR Critiques, Please

Dear Dragon,

We need your reviewers to start critiquing most, if not all, TSR products. Why? Because no one else does. I know you don't want to be perceived as a house organ, but I think we deserve to be given a review of items we might actually buy instead of deservedly obscure games that very few of us care about. After all, we buy DRAGON Magazine primarily to help our AD&D® game, right? So why aren't the majority of these goods reviewed where their main buyers can read them?

I cheered when I saw the review of AL-QADIM® in issue #220! That is exactly what we need more of. Seeing that made me realize what the magazine is missing. Your readers deserve to know, for example, that in *Spellbound* they need to redo the spells of some of the mages because the number of spells per level granted to some of them is wrong for the listed class and level.

Mistakes like this have also crept into the Marco Volo series, as well, but no one apologizes or publicizes this so that beginning DMs can be warned. I also think people should be alerted to the delights of *Ruins of Zhentil Keep*.

Steve Shawler
2901 Rio Rita Ave, #3
Louisville, KY 40220

We tread a fine line here, but you're right. We should review—at least in encapsulated form—as much as we can. The problem, however, is limited space. We could almost do a monthly magazine just for gaming reviews if we covered everything deserving of mention. I also agree with you about the AL-QADIM article: so much so that I immediately went to the Candy Store (AKA the Mail Order Hobby Shop) and grabbed one of everything on AL-QADIM. My own campaign is about to take a surprising turn for my players.

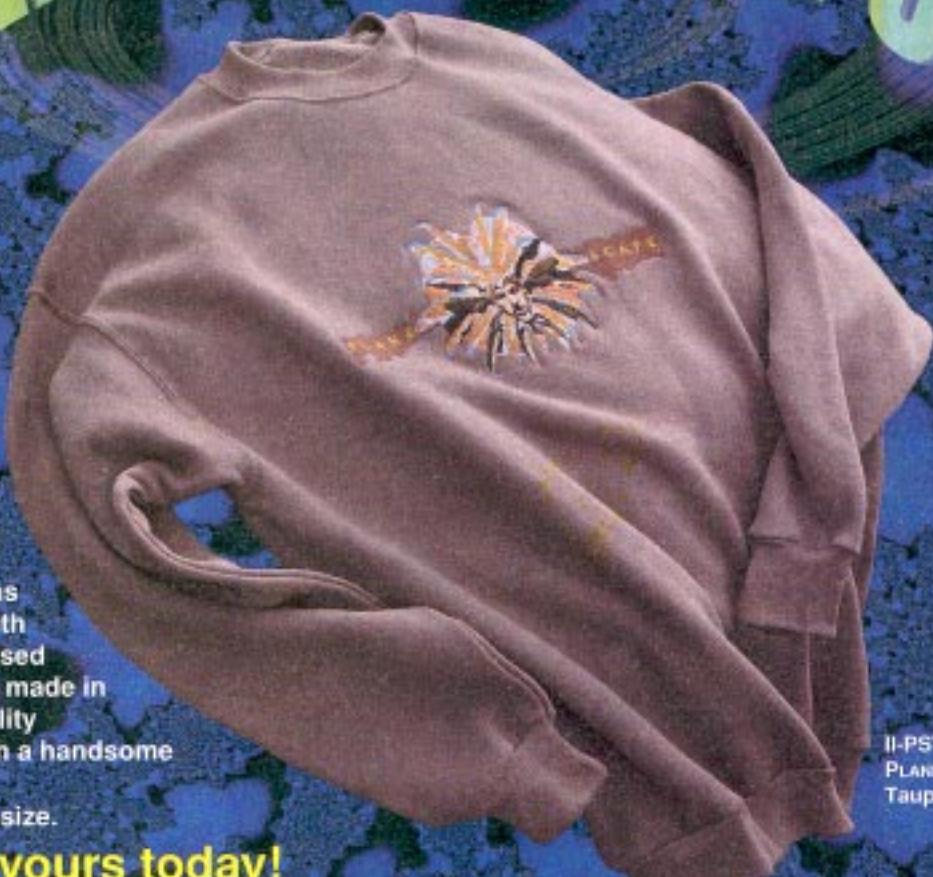
So Ya Wanna write for Us, eh ?

Dear Dragon,

Feature sections such as Arcane Lore, Bazaar of the Bizarre, and the Dragon's Bestiary are by far my favorites, and I eagerly search for them in the table of contents with each new issue. I understand that the staff of DRAGON Magazine can only print those articles that are worthy of publication, so as I hone my writing skills I plan to submit article proposals for the above features.

Continued on page 40

CLOAKS OF COMFORT



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We're All in this Together

by Dave Gross

bearded, losers who've never kissed a girl." "Vampire players are posers who invent tragic personae to whine about something more romantic than their own pathetic lives." "Star Fleet Battles players are math geeks who demonstrate their own brand of herd dominance by min/maxing the best spaceship."

The first time I knew there was something desperately wrong with science-fiction and fantasy fandom (I'll call it simply "fandom") was in the elevator of the Hunt Valley Inn near Baltimore. We were there for Balticon, a large regional SF convention. My two friends and I had dressed up, the ladies in a matching pair of drop-dead blue dresses, me in a black pinstripe suit and spiffy tie. It worked out because I had to teach earlier that day. And no one in his right mind would complain about those dresses.

The other people in the elevator were dressed in the atypical fashions that become so typical at SF conventions; I think there was a Klingon, a pair of fantasy warriors, maybe a furry monster, and several people in the ubiquitous T-shirts and jeans of cons. My friends and I were the ones who looked out of place, as a young man in tattered medieval garb pointed out.

"Look, its a fan dressed up as a mundane!" he said, pointing at me. The others laughed, and I smiled. But then I thought about it for a second.

We in fandom—meaning everyone who reads fantasy or SF, who enjoys role-playing games, who watches *Star Trek* with more than passing interest, or who knows what a TARDIS is—we like to think of ourselves as uniquely creative and open-minded. Throughout high school and college, especially, my friends and I prided ourselves on being unique and special people. We also had a lot of fun putting down "the mundanes." We were intelligent and creative; mundanes were stupid and dull. We were accepting and friendly; mundanes were narrow-minded and mean. Clearly, we were superior.

But we're the ones who came up with the appellation "mundanes" (not a terribly clever term, from a group that prides itself on creativity), and we're the ones who use it as a pejorative. Worse yet, we attack

each other when there are no mundanes around for us to gang up on. We need to be better than someone, even if it's someone else who plays games or reads comic books.

How many rivalries or even animosities do we have in fandom right now? Readers of hard SF often look down on those who read space opera, let alone those ridiculous fantasy novels. And fans of fantasy novels often look down on those who read game-related fiction or who, worse yet, actually *play* those weird games. Then we get into the real cannibalism, where players of dark and gritty fantasy games scoff at those who play in medieval fantasy settings—and vice versa. The screwiest form of this prejudice has got to be among players of the same game, where even knowing too much about your game can get you labeled a geek among geeks. (Always open the book and pretend to look up a rule, even if you know it. Otherwise your fellow gamers will think you need to get a life.)

Few of us are really all this bad, at least not all the time. But most of us have looked down our noses at those who like to play different games, read different books, see different movies. Maybe it's because we're all so tired of defending our own pastimes that it's a great relief and a guilty pleasure to attack someone else for a change. Maybe some of us are so sick of being picked on for enjoying the role of a vampire or a paladin or a clone that we need someone else to abuse. I know I've done it. I'll probably do it again, too, on a bad day.

But if I'm having a good day, I might bite my tongue instead, and ask to join one of those flaky games that someone else plays instead of making a joke about it when I'm safely back in the ranks of my group. If I'm lucky, I'll have fun with a new game and make a couple of new friends.

Assuming, of course, that they don't mind having a D&D geek at the table.

When I left teaching to work at TSR, I figured, "Cool. Now I'm legit." And indeed, working for a game company gives you instant, unearned credibility and celebrity among other garners. Every one of us has experienced that weird, dizzying transition upon arriving here from college or other jobs.

It's fun to watch the new "legit" gamers have the same reactions I did only two

years ago. "I get off work to go to a game convention?"

Now, when I go to conventions, people actually ask to hear stories of my home campaign, they ask me what I think makes a good adventure. They treat me like a prince, never a game geek, even as sometimes someone leans slyly in and says, "Just look at those *freaks* dressed all in black."

Except that I'm doing it all for a living, what has changed about me? Yeah, I hadn't thought it all the way through.

Not very long ago, I had occasion to think about how we form little superiority societies even among the people who make games for a living. I figured I was pretty safe within a community of fellow game geeks and SF nerds, here at TSR. But while creating characters for a playtest, someone asked the table at large, "How many bonus proficiencies do you get for a 17 Intelligence?"

Without cracking the book, I answered, "Six"

Everyone at the table looked up at me, eyes wide. Then Bill (or maybe it was Zeb) raised his arm as his head tipped back in an expression of horror (*just like Donald Sutherland at the end of Invasion of the Body Snatchers*).

"Geeeek!"





Pages from the Mages



Christopher S. Drury
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FIRST QUEST is the title of TSR, Inc.'s Audio CD introduction to Role-playing Game. This series is a feature where veterans of role-playing describe their first experience in the hobby.

In the Beginning, There was SF...

by Tom Dowd

My first experience of a role-playing game can be traced without any difficulty to what I do today. Sure, virtually everyone else in this industry can do the same, but were it not for a singular element the first game I ever played I can safely say that I would not be writing this today. Prior to thinking about what I was going to write for this column I really hadn't made that connection.

I had always, as far back as I can remember, enjoyed science fiction. I think that stemmed from an early fascination with the space program that grew into more speculative areas. One of my earliest memories, and I have very few, is of sitting and watching the first moon landing, and I'm sure that if I looked hard enough I could find a regular 8mm film of the Apollo-Soyuz linkup filmed off a tiny black-and-white television sitting on the back patio because our big 20" Zenith was broken and the backyard was the only place that I could get good enough reception. I can also remember getting up early before school to watch *Speed Racer Thunderbirds*, and occasionally *Fireball XL-5* when the TV station had run out of *Thunderbirds* episodes. My interest in science fiction grew concurrently with the country's interest, an interest that soared with *Star Wars*, *Alien*, and beyond.

Fantasy, however, was another matter entirely. When I was still in grade school (I can't place the year exactly) my aunt gave me copies of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. I did not read them for many years after noticing that *The Hobbit* began auspiciously with "In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit." That was clearly kid's stuff and I was well beyond it. The books sat and languished for some time.

I don't remember what drew me back to them, and I don't really remember any interest in fantasy prior to my full reading of the series. But once I had read them, that was that. Typical, I suppose, but I've noticed lately a reluctance on the part of some in this industry to point to those books as an early influence. Okay, brand me common but the depth, color, sense of wonder, detail and perhaps most importantly, background, were major contributions to my becoming involved with gaming. The realization that *The Lord of the*

Rings was a story set in a fantastical world that had history was astounding. Getting to read *The Silmarillion*, dense and obtuse as it is, was revelatory. With that knowledge, *The Lord of the Rings* became almost a different tale. That to my mind at the time was the coolest thing there was.

To the best of my recollection, I became aware of gaming through an article in the *Newsday* newspaper on Long Island, New York, sometime in the early '80s. The article started out talking about table-top wargaming and then briefly touched upon this strange cousin of the wargame, something called role-playing. The author didn't seem to understand it, and the only explanation he could make from it was that players in a role-playing game got to pretend they were taking part in *The Lord of the Rings*. Bang. 'Nuff said. I was there. The name of the particular role-playing game the author was referring to was DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®.

It was at least a year before I saw the name mentioned again, and truth be told, I'd probably pretty much forgotten about it by then. It was again in *Newsday*, but this time in an advertisement along the bottom edge of the front page of the Sunday funny pages. The ad was for Waterloo Hobbies in Mineola, Long Island, and it said they carried DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. I promptly lost the ad (okay, I forgot to tell my parents to save it) but remembered that the store was on Mineola Boulevard. A couple of weekends of nagging later I'd convinced my father that we had to find this place.

We set out on a Saturday afternoon and quickly found it. We were there for hours, my father bored out of his skull, and I wandering wide-eyed. There were books, magazines, dice, and games with names like Traveller*, Tunnels and Trolls*, Villains and Vigilantes*, Melee*, Diplomacy*, Gangster*, and of course DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. There was even something there called ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®, but I had no real idea what DUNGEONS & DRAGONS was let alone an advanced version. I spent my money and walked away with the basic D&D® boxed set (the one with the blue rulebook) and a set of amazing disintegrating roll-forever dice. I read that book on Sunday and the

next Saturday my father and I were back at Waterloo Hobbies, and I was the proud owner of a copy of the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS Player's Handbook, 'cause, well, if it was advanced it had to be better, right? (And, well, there were things in the basic rules that I just didn't understand and figured that the bigger rulebook would explain them better... I think that concept has become an axiom of game design.)

A few weeks later I'd put my name up on one of the sign-up sheets on the bulletin board at the store and showed up for my first game, I and about 10 other people. The gamemaster, Dan Fitzgerald, was only a little more experienced than I was, but it was a few game sessions before he let that on, and if he hadn't I don't think we'd have known. The group's size was quickly paired down to a manageable seven or so, the majority of whom became the core of the group I gamed with for nearly a decade. Dan, Caroline Maher, Tom Keane, Stuart Wieser, Jeff Jarka, and a little later Chris Criscione, were the people from whose playing and game-mastering styles and habits I learned much of what I know today. None of us were experienced gamers, we figured it out as we went along.

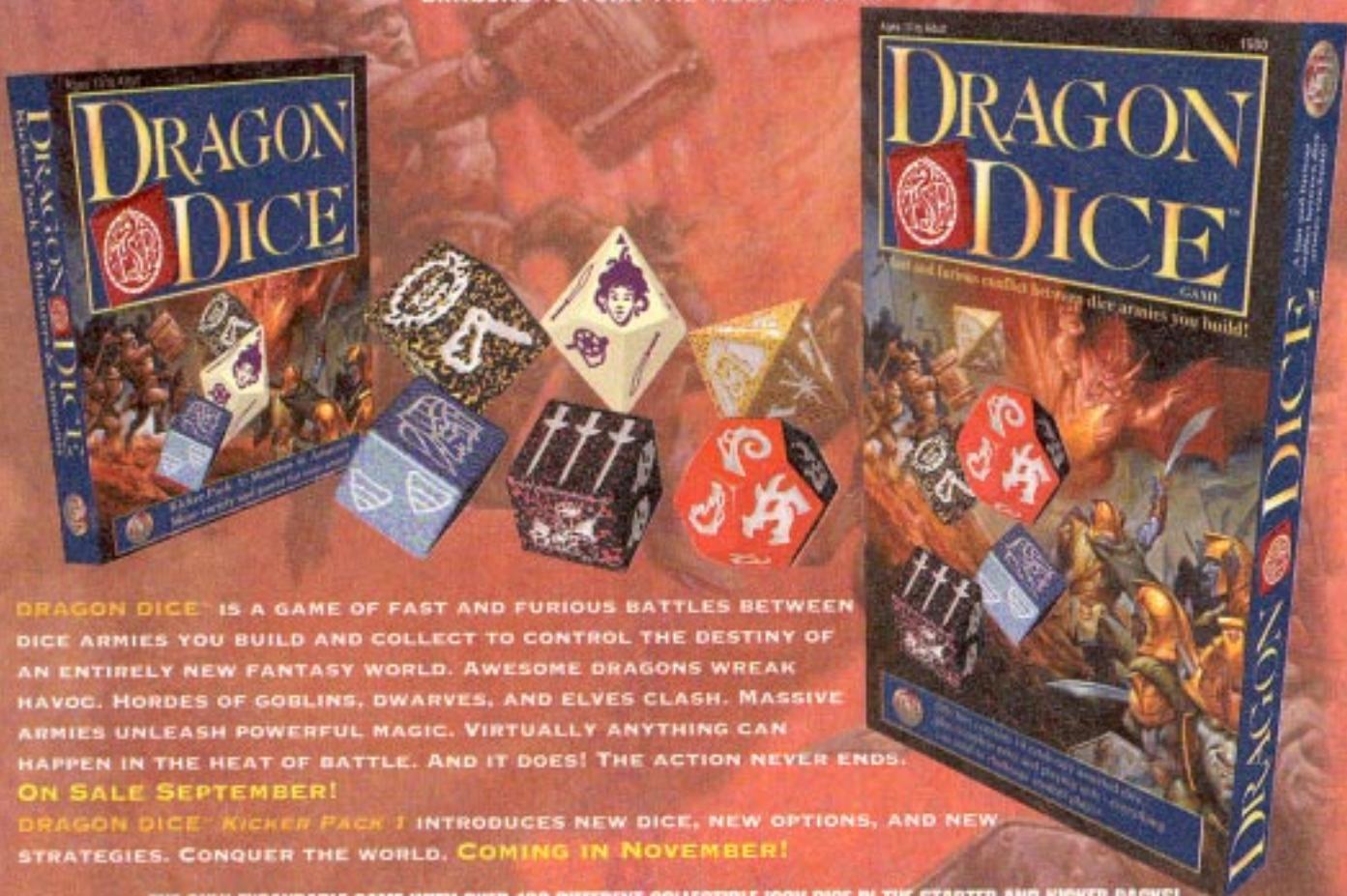
Those games took place in one of the gaming rooms at Waterloo Hobbies, and that's the element that if different I wouldn't be writing this today. It turned out that Waterloo Hobbies shared space and ownership with Fantasy Games Unlimited, publishers at the time of *Bunnies and Burrows**, *Chivalry and Sorcery**, *Land of the Rising Sun**, and the aforementioned Villains and Vigilantes. And because of that the owner of Fantasy Games Unlimited (AKA FGU, 'cause at the time you weren't a game company unless you had an acronym), Scott Bizar (his parents, Sylvia and Leon, ran Waterloo) was constantly around, as were Jeff Dee, Bill Willingham, Bob Weller, and Bob Charrette. Employees at various times of Fantasy Games Unlimited, they were my first professional exposure to the game industry, and I was well served by them all. I eventually got a job working in the

Continued on page 40

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Now You Know Their Names...

by **Colin McComb**

Artwork by Tony DiTerlizzi



The Lords of the Nine

It's no dark that the baatezu are cagey bashers. They've got secrets hidden that would astonish the powers, and they do their level best to keep their secrets dark; but occasionally they slip. When they do, their mysteries spill out across the multiverse.

This article is based on the *Baator* book from the PLANESCAPE™ Campaign Set. It's highly recommended that one read that book before this text.

The Logs of Willgan the Dogged

The years ain't been kind to me, but did that stop me? No. It didn't. And while those sods who called 'emselves scholars danced and laughed with the Sensates slipped away across the boundaries of death, I've held on, my studies just becoming all that much more important.

And now they've paid off. I might not have been looking for the elusive sound of color or the mysteries behind the forms of the powers. I've never been that imaginative. Some'd call that a curse. Me, I call it a blessing. It means that I focus on the facts and don't let ill-formed fancies distract me from the truth.

Do I seem bitter? I am. I've been mocked and reviled, my quest called emptiness, my heart left desolate from the bleakness of the truth I sought to uncover. But now it's done and I've snatched the dark right out from under the baatezu nose.

Ha!

I've got the dark on the Lords of the Nine, and I'll be cursed if anyone can stop me from making my life better from this point on!

The Lords of the Nine are the mysterious rulers of Baator, the Nine-Layered Pit, the Stinking Maw of the planes. Their origins are lost to the mists of time, seemingly

stretching back before even the powers remember. Their true capabilities have never been defined, at least until now.

They are, in short, an enigma. What is their purpose? Do they simply act as wardens for their plane, or do they play a more active role? Do they truly even exist? And how do they relate to the denizens of their plane, from the lowest baatezu to the most powerful of the gods?

To understand the Lords, perhaps it's best to summarize exactly what it is they're said to be and do.

The Lords and What They Are

Though many discount the Lords as the crazed imaginings of those who've wandered the bleak wastes of Baator, the truth is that the Lords have shaped the plane since time immemorial. They may seem to be nothing more than primal forces, incorporeal and unwanting, but that isn't so. They're all individuals, and they're all ferociously hungry for more power. It's just that their desires make them known over the millennia, as opposed to the petty length of a mortal lifetime. That's not to say that the Lords can't act quickly when they need to; they just prefer to make their plans on a much longer range.

The Lords are each set over a single layer of Baator, their presence twisting and warping their layers to be more precisely what they themselves embody. Thus it is that Avernus, the first layer, is a blasted and scarred wasteland, perfect for training the armies of baatezu in the endless Blood War, while the fourth layer of Phlegethos is a fiery pit, burning all who travel its infernal depths. They are the defenders and protectors of each of these

layers, each Lord taking the qualities of the layer in an effort to keep its essential nature pure of the ravages of chaos. Who set them this task, none can say—but it's an assignment they fulfill to the best of their abilities.

Every Lord has a name, though throughout time only the names of three have been commonly known. Just like other fiends, the names of the Lords of the Nine are names to conjure power with—the prime wizard who actually uses these names is in for a devil of a time, but that doesn't keep the attempted conjuring from being an inconvenience.

It wasn't without pain that I discovered their names. I've endured much for this moment, the setting of their names to paper and thus to immortality. Though these are not their true names, they are still names with power. The Lords are: Bel, Warlord of shattered Avernus; Dispater, Archduke of iron-hot Dis; Minauros, Viscount of the sunken Minauros; Fierana, the Fiery Lady of Phlegethos; Prince Levistus of watery Stygia; The Hag Countess Malagard of Malbolge; The Slug Archduke of Maladomini, Triel the Fallen; Baron Molikroth of ice-locked Cania; and the Dark Lord of shadowy Nessus.

Chant is that the Lords occasionally attempt to wrest away pieces of another Lord's layer. Prince Levistus, Lord of the Fifth, is said to be particularly greedy in this regard. It's thought that he's planning an assault on one of his compatriots—at least, that's the word in Stygia, his layer, and the amnizu baatezu there are busy recruiting berks they think would be good for the job.

Their Powers

The Lords are some of the most powerful bashers in the known cosmos. They control whole layers of a plane, which is far more than most powers can claim. The Abyssal lords claim as much, but the chaotic politics of the Abyss ensure that the tanar'ri lords never rise far above their compatriots. The Lords of the Nine, on the other hand, are willing to set aside their differences to achieve a common goal; the Abyssal lords seem incapable of that.

In a sense, the Lords *are* their layers. They have the ability to shake the land around them, to make it erupt and heave up its contents. They can see all through their layer, piercing through nearly any veil thrown up for privacy—it's unclear as to whether they can see into a power's realm without the god's say-so.

Of course, they're not omniscient. They aren't aware of every pebble's fall and every gust of wind—but if they wanted to be for a time, they could be. They'd just have to divert their attentions from other matters, that's all.

Are they omnipotent on their home layer? It's unknown but the truth is that it'd be highly unlikely. They've got an incredible amount of power, yes, but that doesn't mean they can do everything. It's a well-known fact that they rarely coerce someone into doing something; the best-laid plots will make anyone of whatever station carry out his functions willingly, thinking whatever it is was his idea in the first place. Displacer especially loves to twist people into doing his bidding. Only in the most extreme cases will he ever use his immense might to warp a mind.

They've got the powers of wind and rain, earth and fire at their disposal (though of course some are more likely to use one than the other). They've also got specialties, each of them focusing on a particular destructive power. The Lord of Avernus uses explosions. Displacer uses emotion. Minauros favors disease. Fierana, naturally, punishes with flame, while Levistus carries the power of amnesia and its attendant miseries. The Hag Countess destroys by sheer force and crushing weight, while Triel fancies entropy and decay. Molikroth favors ice... and the ninth? None know, but it must be a fearsome power indeed, if no one will speak of it.

Their Relationships

It's no dark that the Lords pass their orders to someone. They've got to have dealings with someone if they want anything accomplished, right? So who do they deal with? The list is fairly small. They deal with each other, naturally. They bargain with the powers. They pass orders to the pit fiends and lesser baatezu. And occasionally, they'll make a pact with a mortal.

The Other Lords

Their feelings about each other could be best described as resigned hatred. They despise each other, but they're rarely in a position where they can affect one another. As mentioned above, they occasionally attempt to poach some land from one layer or another, trying to increase their own holdings at the expense of their fellows, but this ploy rarely succeeds. When it does, it's not without consequence. Still, they find it an amusing game. Perhaps they're testing each other, or perhaps their role in this is to see what nature will emerge triumphant. Regardless of the truth, it's known that they use mortals as pawns in their endless games, steering them hither and yon in fruitless quests until the Lords grow bored of the charade.

It has been said in legend that a mortal has actually managed to lure the Lords into outright fighting. How this was achieved, no one knows, but to match wits against the Lords of the Nine, you'd have to be barmy or brilliant... or both.

The Lords are usually too busy to attend to every pressing matter. That's why they created the substrata of nobles below them. In fine feudal fashion, each has an entire staff and court who deals with the petty matters of the layer, leaving the Lord free to concentrate on truly important matters. The nobles are obviously of lesser ranks, though they might pretend to be of lofty status. All of them, however, are pit fiends of incredible power. Some are more powerful and long-lived than the Dark Eight themselves, while others are still young but show excellent cunning.

The nobles plot and scheme on their own, working to further the ends of their masters and to benefit their own careers. It's said that when a pit fiend learns how the true power works and things are run, he can try to seize the mantle of the Lord for himself. It's happened several times.

Naturally, these nobles are not above the use of mortals in their schemes. Some allow the mortals to play an important role in their plotting. And some actually encourage the mortals to develop their own schemes.

The Powers

So what's the relationship of the Lords with the powers? Nobody really knows; probably strained at best, though it's unlikely that they're actively hostile to each other. Struggles among beings of this magnitude generally leave entire layers of planes devastated, and it's unlikely either the powers or the Lords would find that acceptable.

Nevertheless, it's no secret that Set and Prince Levistus have nearly come to outright war. The two have aims that aren't entirely compatible, and each works in subtle ways to bring down the other. Levistus has used his mortal agents to destroy temples dedicated to Set, while Set's minions wreak havoc on the amnizu

and the cities of Stygia. They've reached an impasse for now, but both would love a chance to tweak the nose of the other, and they'll handsomely reward anyone who can do it for them.

Rumor has it that it was the enmity of one of the Lords that forced the orcish pantheon to flee to Acheron and points beyond. Now, that may or may not be true—but if it is, the Lords have got to be even mightier than previously believed.

It's not unknown for the Lords and the powers to work together on occasion. They've got common enemies in the tanar'ri, bringers of chaos, not to mention various other powers. Why, a Lord might aid one of the powers on his or her own layer against the power from another. It's called the politics of expediency, and the Lords and the powers practice it whenever they can.

The Fiends

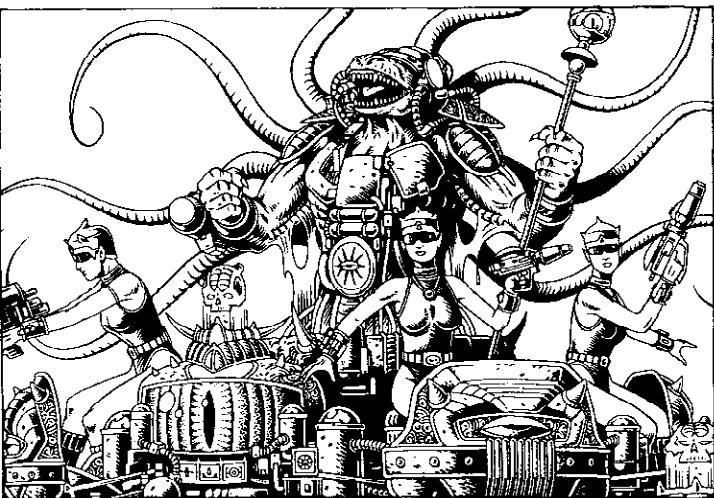
This is the part that's most interesting to me. Why in all the heavens would someone as powerful as one of the Lords ever choose to have anything to do with the lowly fiend? Are the Lords watchers over the baatezu race, or do their duties run deeper than that? What is it that we're missing?

Oddly enough, the Lords tend to leave the fiends to their own devices. It's unknown if the Lords have any dealings with the Dark Eight, the nominal rulers of the baatezu. Still, one would think that the eternally raging Blood War would give the Lords pause for thought, since it's their land that's going by the wayside if the tanar'ri make it this far.

My thought on the matter is that the fiends are simply like the proxies of the Lords, that they're an even lesser tool than the noble caste. The Lords do care about the War; it's just so far down on their priorities that they've delegated it in its entirety to the baatezu.

The Lords certainly command vast armies of baatezu on their own-fiends who are outside the structure of the baatezu hierarchy imposed by the Dark Eight. Though the Lords' minions have to undergo the same selection and elevation tortures, they answer only to the nobles of the Lords, and to their Lord in particular. That doesn't keep the Dark Eight's baatezu enforcers from throwing these berks into the army when possible—it's said that the Lords' servants are insufferably smug, and they're usually the ones in the front lines, unless they can find someone to take their place.

All fiends eventually bow to the Lords of the Nine, if for no other reason than that the Lords could crush the life from the baatezu. But the fiends are rarely called upon to do such a thing, for the Lords have other servants and proxies to fulfill their wishes.



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The Mortal Compact

Once in a millenia, a mortal is powerful enough or canny enough to be able to sneak through the defenses of the Lords—or perhaps the Lords allow it as part of some scheme they have. Regardless, the Lord conjured occasionally finds it amusing to manifest himself fully in the presence of the mortal, “gracing” the poor sod with the complete glory of the Lord. Sometimes it’s to burn the offender to cinders; more often it’s to lead the mortal on a path of betrayal that’ll drive him to insanity while increasing the Lord’s power tremendously.

This happens most commonly through priesthoods. The Lords gains power from mortal worshipers, just as a god would, though he cannot grant spells. Still, the devotion of mortals is a powerful thing, and it’s something Lords covet. It’s said that that’s the reason the Lords even bother to trifle with mortals at all.

The only problem is this: How do these cults retain worshipers if there’s no evidence that they’ve got power? That’s where the politics of expediency come in. Before establishing a priesthood on the Prime, the Lord usually has to perform a favor for one of the powers of Baator. In return (and usually in return for some of the power gained from the ceremonies), the power sends along some of his rituals to the mortal priest, creating a strange combination of beliefs, but one that’s deadly nonetheless.

These priesthoods have become more and more common of late. Their rites are obscene, their methods perverse. Are the Lords allowing more priesthoods? And if so, does that not mean they’re trying to become powers in their own right?

Whatever the cause, the cults of the Lords of the Nine are seducing more mortals with promises of power and immortality ever year, across the Prime and across the Outer Planes. It’s only a matter of time before drastic measures must be taken to curb their worship.

The Lords Themselves

This was the hardest dark of all to come by. If the Lords resisted generalities about themselves for so long, how d’you think they’d feel about their personal secrets bein’ spilled?

Well, too bad, one way or another. They’re going to have to face the music sometime, and it might as well be now. I’ve outlined their names, what I could glean of their histories, and any other information I thought might be useful.

The Warlord of Avernus

The original Lord of Avernus (not Tiamat, contrary to popular belief) found herself imprisoned and entrapped by her warlord, the pit fiend Bel, thousands of years ago. She’s now struggling to break free, but her struggles become weaker and

weaker as Bel siphons more of the Lord’s power for himself. For all intents, Bel is the new Warlord of Avernus, and that suits the other Lords just fine—at least, it seems to; they’ve not lifted a finger to aid their ensnared sister.

However, because of this, Avernus has become a little fiercer, more brutal than it was under the original Lord; and the Lord of the First now has little time to oversee the maintenance of the layer—for while he has the power, he does not have the time. He cannot back out of his responsibilities to the Dark Eight, though he could probably crush them if he so desired—except that they remain in the fortress Malsheem in Nessus, and Bel’s dominion extends only over the first layer.

Bel has only recently discovered how to create an avatar. The avatar takes the form of a burly humanoid with a jutting chin and powerful arms. The avatar’s skin is slightly tinged with red, and his brooding scowl and the promise of rage held barely in check dissuades many from offending the representative of the Lord of the First.

The Warlord’s Avatar (fighter 20)

Str 24	Dex 22	Con 21
Int 18	Wis 15	Cha 20
MV 15, F124	SZ L (7')	MR 75%
AC -4	HD 20	hp 155
#AT 3	THAC0 2	Dmg 112 +16

Special Att/Def: The sheer size and power of Bel’s avatar is enough to make anyone of good alignment under the 10th level save vs. spells or suffer as if under the effects of a *fear* spell. Those of neutral or evil alignment under 10th level must save vs. spells or suffer from *ove*.

If necessary, Bel can call forth 15 HD *fireballs* from the air at will.

The Archduke of Dis

Dispater is thought to be one of the oldest of the Lords of the Nine. He’s certainly cunning enough that he’d want to give that impression anyway. He governs the second layer from his tower of lead and iron, able to see the tiniest details of the plane from the tower’s height. His layer is a gray-green plane of heat and pain, perfectly reflecting the suave archduke.

Dispater never loses his temper. Though anger burns within his chest, he prides himself on his restraint and smooth manner. Should he actually lose his temper, chances are he’ll annihilate the witnesses rather than let them report his shame.

Dispater’s avatar appears as a 10’ tall man with yellow skin, a pit fiend’s horns, and a fluttering red cape.

The Archduke’s Avatar (fighter 15, wizard 20)

Str 20	Dex 19	Con 20
Int 24	Wis 22	Cha 22
Mv15	SZ L (10’)	MR 90%
AC -2	HD 15	hp 150
#AT 2	THAC0 5	Dmg 1-8 + 10

Special Att/Def: In his tower, Dispater simply cannot be harmed. As it is his center of power, weapons pass through the archduke and spells melt harmlessly from his person. The statistics above are for the rest of the layer.

Dispater’s special defense is to make those attacking him relive their lowest moments. Whether they were being beaten in an alley behind a pub or falling from the heights of Mount Celestia, Dispater can summon the memory and make his enemies relive the entire miserable experience.

The Viscount of Minauros

Minauros the Serpent dwells in the Sinking City, his bulk writhing and spasming through the fetid water of his layer. He’s indirect and venomous, his schemes convoluted and twisted. He speaks in riddles, never coming straight to the point, even when giving orders. His cadre of fiends emulates this behavior, hoping to impress their Lord.

Minauros seems to spend most of his time in the waters underneath his city, living an amphibious life amidst the foetus of his layer. He doesn’t roam far from the Sinking City preferring to oversee his lands from a single location.

The Viscount’s avatar appears as a gargantuan snake with a humanoid torso where the head would be. His eyes are slitted and yellow, his tongue is forked, and he speaks in a sibilant whisper.

The Viscount’s Avatar (fighter 14, thief 18)

Str 19	Dex 23	Con 21
Int 21	Wis 19	Cha 18
MV 12, Sw18	SZ G (30’)	MR 80%
AC -5	HD 14	hp 160
#AT 5/2	THAC0 6	Dmg 1-8 + 14

Special Att/Def: Minauros can, on a successful attack roll of 15 or better, sink his fangs into one of his enemies. If Minauros drops his weapons and attacks with his powerful arms, he can try to pin his victim; this requires two successful attack rolls of 8 or better. If he pins his victim in this fashion, he needs only an 8 or better to bite. A body thus bitten must save vs. poison or contract a wasting disease similar to that of the mummy—except that the Viscount’s disease cannot be healed, and it drains the life from its victims by the hour, rather than by the day.

The Fiery Lady of Phlegethos

Fierana, Lady of Phlegethos, is rarely seen and her presence rarely felt. She prefers to lose herself in the boiling magma of her lands, letting the pit fiend Gazra govern; however, she’s not foolish enough to let him have too much power, and she reminds him of her rightful position whenever she thinks he’s planning on turning stag.

Her temper is mercurial, her moods fickle. She’s like the dancing flame, mov-

ing from one obsession to the next, burning her way through eternity. However, she does so in a pattern that perhaps only she can see—anything less would be chaotic, and her job is to preserve order.

Her avatar appears as a beautiful young woman with flaming red hair and a lithe figure. The berk who's fooled by her beauty deserves what he gets—being turned into a charred husk.

The Lady's Avatar (wizard 20)

Str 15	Dex 20	Con 19
Int 23	Wis 20	Cha 21
MV 18, F136	SZ M (6')	MR 90%
AC -3	HD 20	hp 140
#AT 2	THAC0 8	Dmg 1-6 + 10

Special Att/Def: Fierana has absolute power over all flame in her layer. She can take any flame that's brought near her and turn it against anyone she desires. Oddly, she takes no damage from cold- or water-based attacks; they serve only to irritate her, and she'll burn anyone who's foolish enough to try them on her.

The Prince of Stygia

Levistus is probably one of the least popular of the Lords of the Nine, especially among his compatriots. He sets aside the rules they've laid down for themselves and is constantly attempting to aggrandize himself, usually at the expense of others. His cadre of amnizu ignores the hierarchy of the pit fiends, and they're always planning mischief against the Dark Eight.

Their concerted dislike of him is partially what has kept Levistus from overcoming the rest of the Lords. When they catch on to his schemes, they work together to destroy them; while they hate each

Levistus's avatar is a darkly handsome, brooding man. He prefers to dress in fancy clothes and adorn himself with finery when he appears to mortals. However, he's usually too busy governing Stygia and hatching plans from his icy prison to bother himself with manifesting an avatar.

The Prince's Avatar (thief 23)

Str 19	Dex 24	Con 16
Int 23	Wis 22	Cha 21
MV 15	SZ M (6')	MR 80%
AC -4	HD 23	hp 155
#AT 2	THAC0 3	Dmg 1-8 + 10

Special Att/Def: With a successful attack, Levistus has the ability to induce amnesia in his enemies as though he had



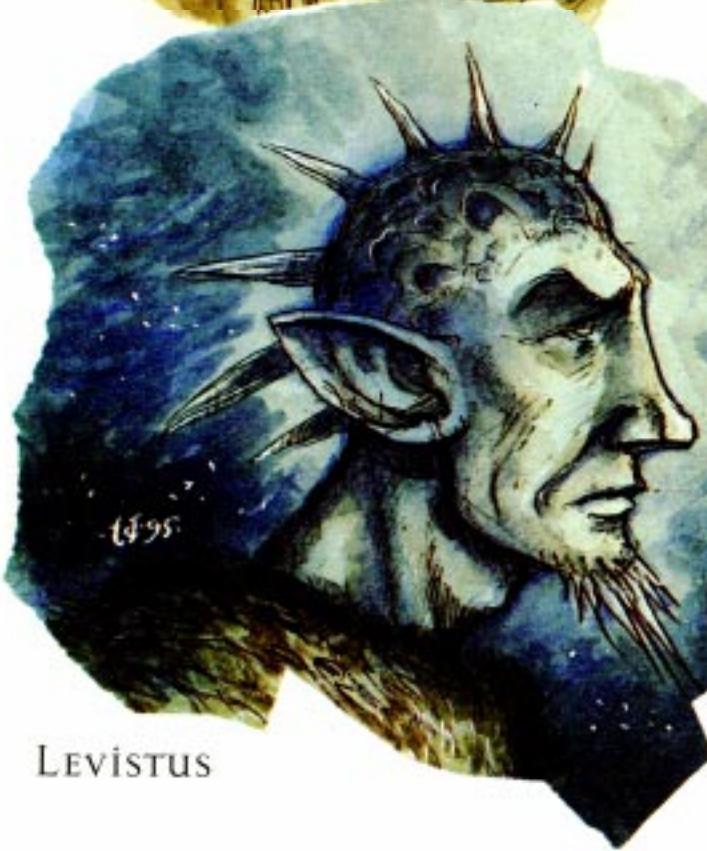
DISPATER

MINAUROS

FIERANA



LEVISTUS



immersed them in the River Styx. If he's successful, he refrains from slaying his victims, preferring instead to tantalize them with the tortuous hints of their previous existence.

The Hag Countess of Malbolge Malagard, the Hag Queen of the Crushing Lands, delights in surprise appearances. The cities of her layer are huge bronze citadels, each of which is under the command of a pit fiend. The citadels constantly resound from the huge boulders crashing into them, and the inhabi-

tants need to be constantly vigilant of stresses in the bronze. If they're not, Malagard makes sure that the next inhabitants will be; more than one fortress has lost its inhabitants when she's come in with her great flaming sword to correct their mistakes.

Malagard's avatar is not unreasonable, but she doesn't excuse foolishness. She appears as an old crippled hag, stooped from the weight of the years. She carries immense power under her withered exterior, teaching that it's best never to judge someone on the basis of appearance. She carries a sword that flames with her anger; it looks too heavy for her to wield, but in her hands it's as light as a feather. Anyone else who touches it takes an immediate 1d20 + 20 hp damage.

The Countess's Avatar (fighter 18)

Str 22	Dex 19	Con 20
Int 21	Wis 19	Cha 12
MV 24	SZ L (10')	MR 85%
AC -5	HD 18	hp 170
#AT 3	THAC0 3	Dmg 1-12 + 10

Special Att/Def: At will, the Hag Countess can bring a *meteor swarm* down on one particular enemy, or cause an avalanche to begin under his feet, or force a hail of rocks down upon his head from nowhere. She has absolute control over the physical aspects of her layer, and she'll not hesitate to use that control to destroy her enemies.

MALAGARD



The Slug Archduke of Maladomini

Triel the Fallen was once an archon, or so the chant goes, who was expelled from the lofty heights of Mount Celestia for excessive vanity and the contemplation of eternal perfection taken to extremes. His fellows cast him from the celestial slopes, and his form changed as he fell into the Stinking Maw of Baator. Now he presides over the rotting cities of Maladomini, always searching for the perfect configuration to his city. He's oblivious to the decay of the old cities, always wanting to improve on the new ones.

His avatar is a grossly deformed slug-creature, with vaguely humanoid features and forelimbs that are more like prehensile tails than actual limbs. Still, a mortal who gazes on the avatar can catch glimpses of the beauty that Triel once possessed before he fell.

The Archduke's Avatar (wizard 19, bard 12)

Str 19	Dex 18	Con 13
Int 21	Wis 19	Cha 10
MV6	SZ H (25)	MR 70%
AC -4	HD 18	hp 145
#AT 2	THAC0 7	Dmg 1-8 + 7

Special Att/Def: Triel prefers to age his victims as if he had hit them with a *staff of withering*. If he makes a successful hit with one of his atrophied forelimbs, his victim gains no save and loses the use of his limb.

The Baron of Cania

Molikroth is devious and cruel. No surprise there. What is surprising is the extent to which he takes it. As ruler over frigid Cania, he's got the power of ice and cold, and he knows how to use those tools to such a degree that he can make a proxy cry out for mercy. He delights in torture, rarely leaving the citadel Mephistar, preferring to have his victims come to him.

His interest in

governing his
layer is
com-
plete.
For
the

last few millenia, he's been on his guard against a move by Prince Levistus, and he's grown ever more leery over the years. No one passes into this layer without the Baron's knowledge.

The Baron's avatar is a grossly huge man, beyond foppish in his finery. His clothes are always the height of style in Sigil, and are usually made of ridiculously expensive materials; but even the finest fashions appear foolish on him.

The Baron's Avatar

(wizard 20)

Str 21	Dex 18	Con 17
Int 23	Wis 22	Cha 15
MV 9	SZ H (7)	MR 80%
AC -1	HD 18	hp 160
#AT 1	THAC0 6	
	Dmg 1-12 + 9	

Special Att/Def:

Molikroth's attacks are almost always icy, penetrating even magical defenses against cold.

MOLIKROTH

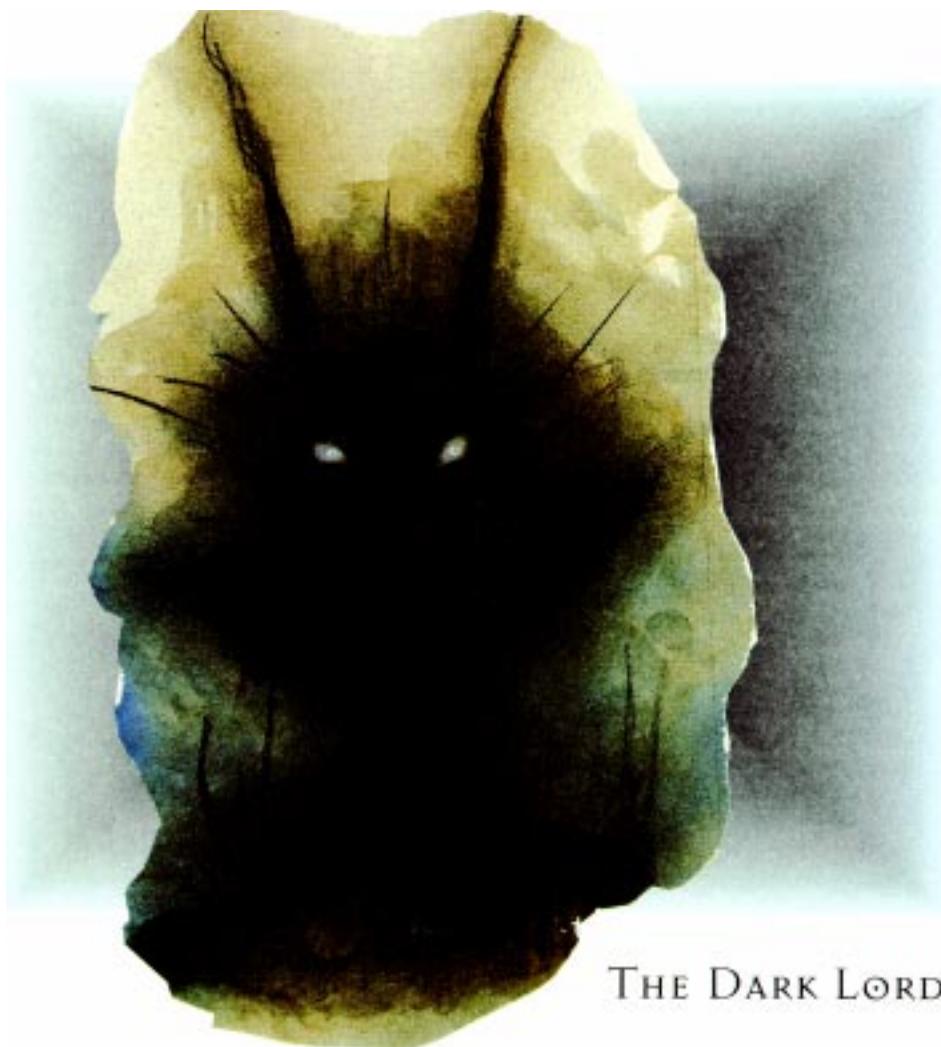
TRIEL

There's no spell known that can resist the frigid batterings of the Baron's will. Frostbite sets in in one round, causing 1d6 hp damage a round. If he's still fighting an enemy after 5 rounds, his opponent must begin to save vs. spells or suffer a cumulative -1 penalty per round the enemy fails the save as the cold slows reflexes and induces torpor.

The Dark Lord of Nessus

I've not been able to find any information on this blood. He (or she, to be totally fair) is so well hidden that it'll take years more of digging through dusty references and painstaking interviews with fiends who should know better. I've come this far though, and I won't be cheated. I can stand to search-for a few more years, I think. What's the worst that could happen to me?

Note: Not long before publication, Willgan the Dogged suffered from what can only be termed a personal implosion. Drops of blood were found where he stood, but no other trace remains of his eventual disposition. We have taken the liberty of publishing this posthumously. Several fiends have commented on it as "a delightful piece of speculative fiction."



THE DARK LORD

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Four Guardian Gargoyles

by John Baichtal

Artwork by Larry Smith



gargoyles

have been classic AD&D® monsters from the beginning, but there really isn't very much variety.

Gargoyles and m-

goyles look pretty much the same, yet mundane architectural gargoyles are incredibly diverse in appearance. It is only natural that other varieties of monstrous gargoyle would surface.

Typically, these variant gargoyles are animated by a wizard or priest and set to guard a specific spot. If the creator dies before the gargoyle is destroyed, then the creature is free to do as it pleases.

Typically, it finds some place to guard. Since its previous existence centered on guarding some location, it is quite understandable that a free-willed gargoyle would continue to do so.

All of the gargoyles in this article look like animated stone; when motionless, they are indistinguishable from normal stonework. They do not need to eat or drink, and they kill only to defend their territory or for enjoyment. All gargoyles, including these, can be injured only by +1 or better weapons.

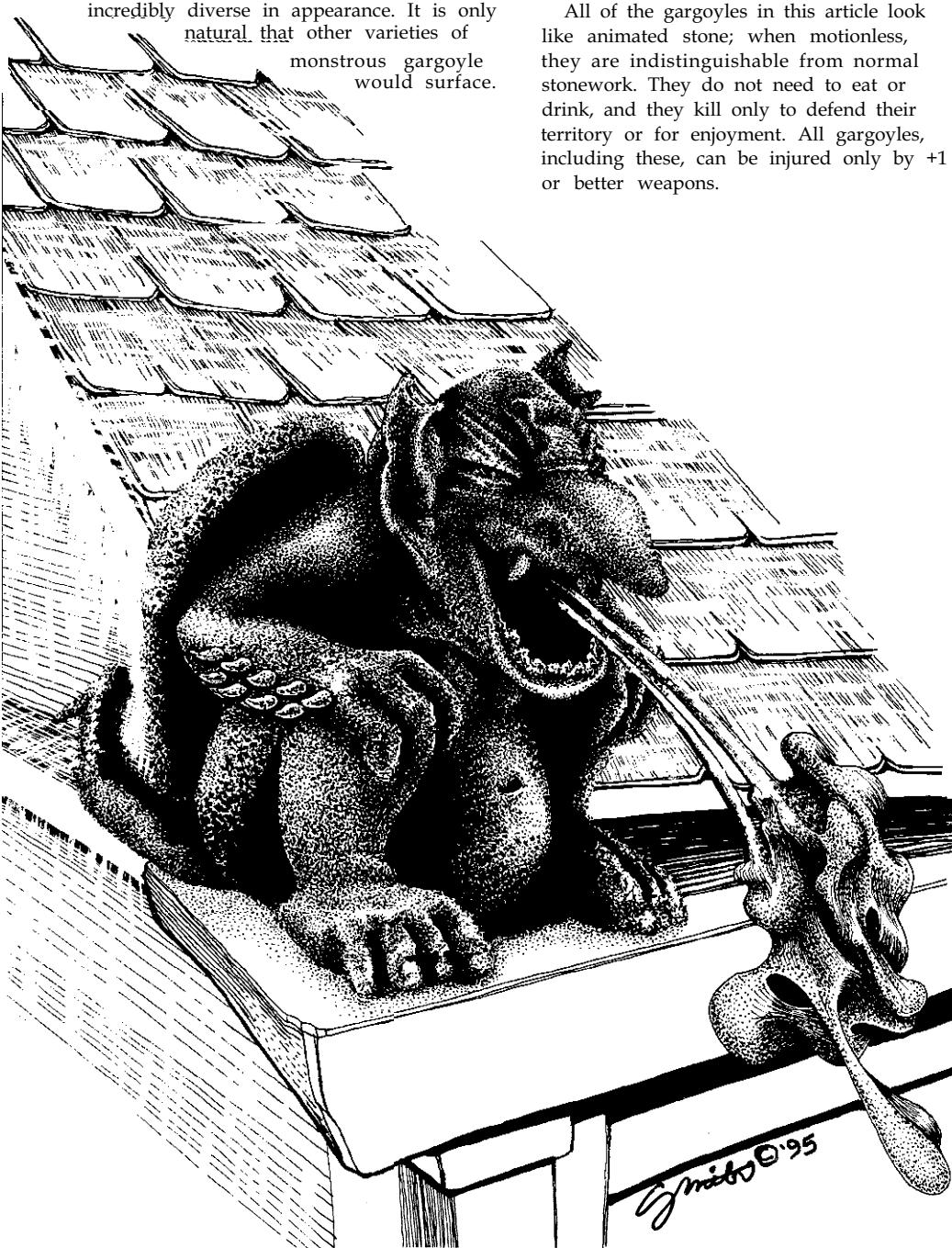
Spouter

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Ruins and occupied dwellings
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral (Evil)
NO. APPEARING:	
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	14
HIT DICE:	5+7
THAC0:	15
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2-5/2-5
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	S (3')
MORALE:	Elite (13-14)
XP VALUE:	1,400

The spouter gargoyle generally looks like an ugly goblinoid statue, often found perched above a door or serving as a rain-gutter outlet on a roof. Its mouth is always gaping hideously, and its forearms sport two rows of sharp spikes; on its back are two undersized wings, far too small to provide flight.

Combat: Anyone who enters the spouter's territory without sneaking the password or making the appropriate gesture will be attacked, usually from above, by the spouter's acid spittle. This spittle can be used only once every four rounds and has a range of just 5' unless the attack is from above (the spouter can attack anyone directly below it no matter how far down). The acid inflicts 2-40 (2d20) points of damage, with a successful save vs. breath weapons indicating half damage. If the spouter's opponents somehow escape or prove resistant to the acid, the gargoyle can float down using its undersized wings to break its fall. The spouter can attack on the ground using its arm-spikes, which cause 1d4+1 points of damage per attack.

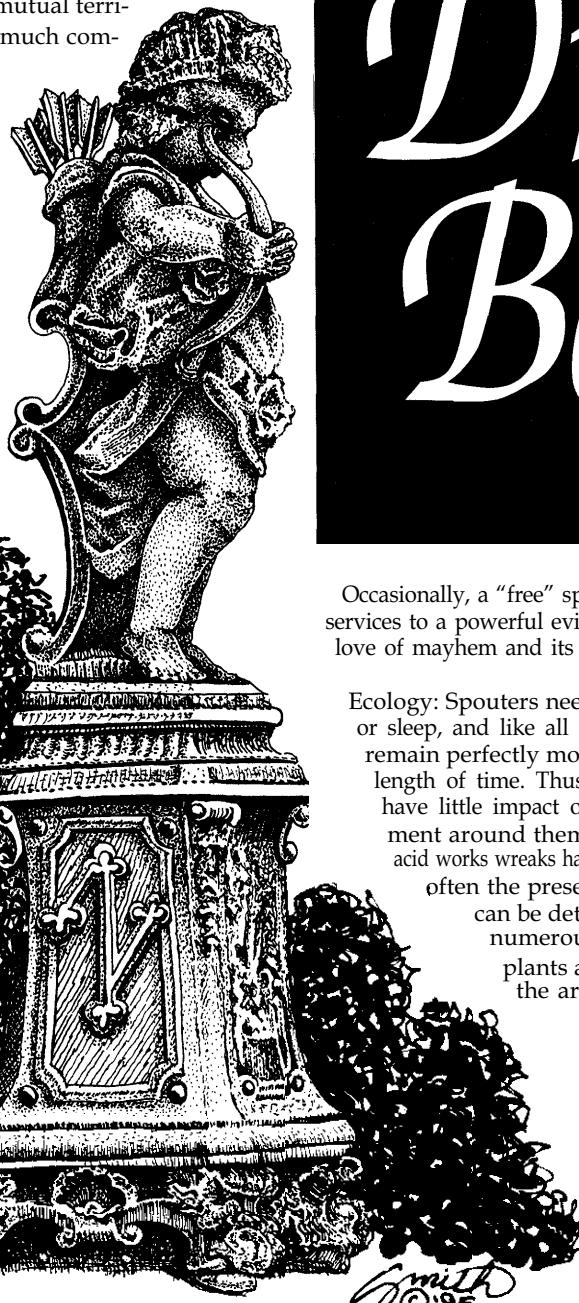
The spouter has a nasty streak and



revels in "accidentally" attacking its master or his or her associates if they forget to make the appropriate signal, even if the gargoyle recognizes them as "safe."

The spouter is immune to all forms of acid, is struck only by +1 or better weapons, and can climb wall with 90% probability.

Habitat/Society: Though occasionally matched sets of spouters are found, usually there is only one creature. Very rarely (5%), a group of 1d4+2 spouters has found each other and joined up in defense of their mutual territory. There isn't much competition between the group members, so there is no chieftain or ruler.



Occasionally, a "free" spouter will offer its services to a powerful evil entity, such is its love of mayhem and its guardian instinct.

Ecology: Spouters need not eat, drink or sleep, and like all gargoyles can remain perfectly motionless for any length of time. Thus, they generally have little impact on the environment around them, though their acid works wreaks havoc on mature and often the presence of a spouter can be detected by the numerous acid-scars on plants and structures in the area.



The Dragon's Bestiary

Archer

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Ruins and occupied dwellings
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic Evil
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	9
HIT DICE:	4+5
THAC0:	17
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Camouflage
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	S (4')
MORALE:	Elite (13-14)
XP VALUE:	975

The archer gargoyle is a malicious creation that looks like a cheerful cherub or, more rarely, a ferocious amazon. Its only visible weapon or means of attack is a stubby bow and quiver of arrows, apparently carved as part of the statue. The archer typically stands in a fountain or on a ledge high up the wall, or serves as a garden ornament, moving to attack only when an intruder enters its territory.

Combat: True to its name, the archer gargoyle uses its bow and arrows as its primary weapon. The bow is not a true bow, and the arrows are just stone; they form the basis for an arrowlike magical attack which hits with a THAC0 of 17 and inflicts 1d10 points of damage; the "arrow" has a range of 100 yards. Even when engaged in melee, the archer uses its bow at point-blank range. Like the margoyle, the archer is able to conceal itself against stone with 20% effectiveness.

Habitat/Society: These evil creatures love to shoot passers-by, even those who pose no threat, and thus are rarely found guarding the domiciles of good-aligned persons. When found in the wild, the archer is on an unending hunt, slaying every living thing it meets. More than one village has been routed by one of these gargoyles, who delight in mayhem and bloodshed. The archer gargoyle is a loner and avoids contact with all others of its kind.

Ecology: Unlike many other kinds of animated gargoyles, the archer has a profound impact on its surroundings because of its tendency to kill every animal and person in its territory, leaving the carcasses to rot. This often causes great ecological upheaval, and special hunting parties are often immediately organized to eliminate the menace of a roving archer gargoyle.

Combat: The stone lion is a superior combatant, functioning as if it had Strength and Dexterity scores of 18. It attacks with its crushing bite and deadly claws but often defeats its opponents more with its speed and agility rather than physical power. The stone lion has one special power: it can roar once every three rounds, and this functions as a scare spell.

Habitat/Society: The stone lion occasionally serves as a pet or companion to its owner and can form friendships with living beings as well as other stone lions.

Ecology: The stone lion has little or no impact on its environment. When not accompanying its master or patrolling the area, the lion is content to sit motionless, defending its territory.

Grandfather Plaque

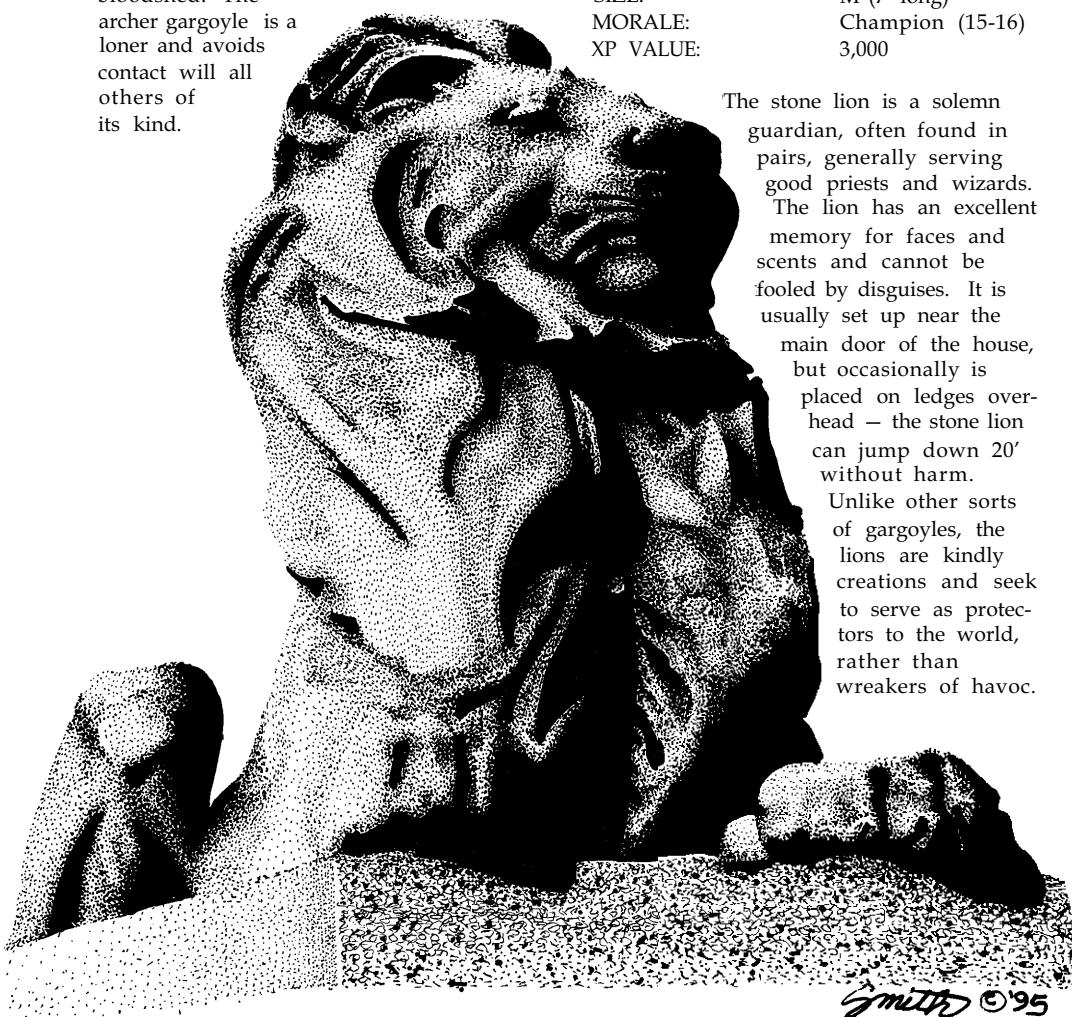
CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Ruins and occupied dwellings
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Nil
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
TREASURE:	Nil
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful Neutral
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	0
HIT DICE:	6+2
THAC0:	N/A
NO. OF ATTACKS:	0
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	N/A
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	S (1-2')
MORALE:	Fanatical (17-18)
XP VALUE:	2,000

The stone lion is a solemn guardian, often found in pairs, generally serving good priests and wizards. The lion has an excellent memory for faces and scents and cannot be fooled by disguises. It is usually set up near the

main door of the house, but occasionally is placed on ledges overhead — the stone lion can jump down 20' without harm.

Unlike other sorts of gargoyles, the lions are kindly creations and seek to serve as protectors to the world, rather than breakers of havoc.

The grandfather plaque is an immobile guardian designed to serve as a security measure for a particular door. The plaque has enough intelligence to screen guests, and it is gifted with telepathy so that it can converse with its master (and only its master—the grandfather plaque can communicate telepathically with only one person, designated at the time of its creation). The grandfather plaque resembles a bas relief of a male human face with strong, dignified features. The gargoyle is placed on the stone lintel of a door and can secure these doors with a *wizard lock* (as if cast by a 6th-level wizard), and can open and close them at will.



Smith ©'95

Combat: If attacked, the plaque can defend itself with three magical powers: each eye can discharge one magic missile per round. Secondly, the grandfather plaque can shout, as the 4th level wizard spell, once per turn. Finally, anyone who actually touches the plaque or the door it guards without permission must save or be weakened, per the 2nd-level wizard spell ray of enfeeblement.



Habitat/Society: The grandfather plaque is totally devoted to guarding its door, and loyally serves whoever lives within. When found on an abandoned building, the plaque will try to get people to either remove it from the building or rebuild the ruin—its existence is meaningless without people to guard. If there is more than one grandfather plaque on a building, they guard separate doors; they are never found together.

Ecology: The grandfather plaque has utterly no impact on the ecology of its surroundings, except when it slays an intruder and the bones and treasure become scattered about. An "unattached" plaque will freely give adventurers any treasure it has accumulated, as long as they promise to restore the gargoyle to its true purpose.

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From Video Arcade to Gaming Table

by Rob Letts

and

Wayne A. Haskett



Primal Rage

Primal Rage* is the hottest video game on the market. The king of the arcades finally became accessible for home game consoles in November, with versions for various personal computer systems being released throughout the fall. If you've never seen Primal Rage, it's a big, bad beat-em-up featuring seven fearsome dinosaur hybrid demigods who fight to the death for total domination of a future Earth where civilization has been destroyed because of a gigantic meteor collision. That game can now be played out in an AD&D® campaign.

The Story so Far:

Eons ago, before humans walked the Earth, seven demigods evolved from the primal life spirits of our planet. These seven embodied all that represented new life: good (Armadon), evil (Diablo), hunger (Sauron), death (Talon), survival (Blizzard), insanity (Vertigo), and filth and carnage (Chaos). In those early days, the skies shook and the Earth trembled with the fevered pitch of the gods' tireless battles—and there was balance.

Then, from a parallel dimension, a great wizard named Balsafas recognized the threat the demigods posed to the rest of the universe, and plotted to disrupt the balance. Lacking the might to kill a demigod outright, he banished one, Vertigo, to an isolated rock tomb at the center of the moon. This disturbance caused an explosion that nearly wiped out all life on Earth and sent the surviving gods into a kind of suspended animation.

Millions of years later, a meteor collided with the Earth, and its destructive fury destroyed cities and rearranged whole continents. A few humans survived, but their technology was gone. The remaining humans were little better than their ancestors of millions of years past. The meteor's other effect was to awaken the sleeping gods, who unleashed their fury on the new "Urth."

Primal Rage in AD&D

We have begun by providing statistics and information on three of the newly awakened demigods.

They all have worshippers who are little better than stone-age primitives. For their bands of followers, treat as villages of aborigines, cavemen, barbarians, or tribesmen as per the *Monstrous Manual™* tome.

If any shamans are encountered, they may have clerical spell ability as 2nd- (or rarely 3rd-1 level priests; these demigods are capricious in their allocation of skills, and they are not truly gods in the sense that the most would understand. The clerical ability stems more from the powerful primal force auras emanating from the demigods, who are the personification, as it were, of certain animal instincts.

As Blizzard is the avatar of survival, his shamans may have spheres of influence of Creation, Healing, Protection, and Summoning. Talon, as the avatar of death, limits his shamans to Healing (specifically preferring the counter-spells), Charm, and Combat. The shamans of Vertigo (insanity personified) have access to Astral, Charm, Divination, Elemental, and Summoning spheres.

In addition to human (and occasionally other demi-human) followers, Talon also has a large clan of velociraptors living with him. No one is sure how many there are. Treat them as an

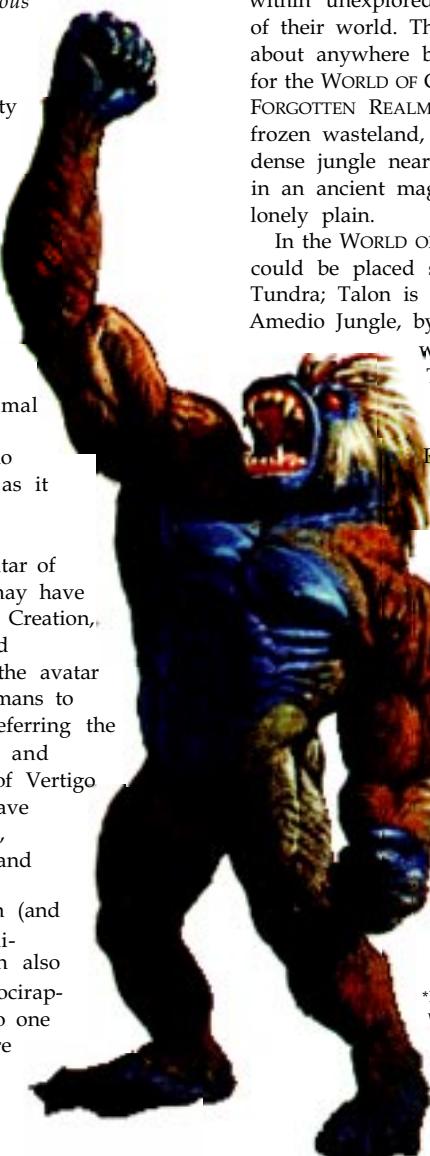
average Intelligence (8–10); rare ones (15%)

may be very intelligent (11–12), or highly intelligent (13–14; 5%). For every six encountered, there will be one young raptor (treat as half the full raptor in all areas).

The Primal Rage demigods exist deep within unexplored and primitive regions of their world. They can be placed just about anywhere but would be best suited for the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® or the FORGOTTEN REALMS®. Blizzard lives in a frozen wasteland, Talon in a clearing in a dense jungle near the ocean, and Vertigo in an ancient magic circle on an isolated, lonely plain.

In the WORLD OF GREYHAWK, Blizzard could be placed somewhere in the Tundra; Talon is rumored to be in the Amedio Jungle, by the Azure Sea; Vertigo will likely be found in Tovag Baragu, where the stone circles are located.

In the FORGOTTEN REALMS, Blizzard's home may be a mountain in Novularond (the Peaks-in-the-Ice) in the middle of the Great Glacier, though some have suggested the Great Mount of Ghaethluntar, just west of the glacier; Talon's clan of raptors could make their home in Chuft; Vertigo could establish her "Urthy" temple in the Endless Waste, east of the High Country and north of the Lake of Mists.



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Blizzard

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Unique
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Day
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Supra-Genius (19-20)
TREASURE:	A
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral Good

NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOUR CLASS:	- 4
MOVEMENT:	30
HIT DICE:	18+12
THAC0:	5
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3
DAMAGE/ATTACKS:	2-20/2-24/4-40
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENCES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	60%
SIZE:	L (20'1
MORALE:	Champion (15-16)
XP VALUE:	17,000

Blizzard is the noblest of the seven ancient gods of "Urth." He personifies the essence of the animal spirit. After being frozen for millenia at the heart of an immense glacier, he was released when the Urth met the Great Meteor.

His dwelling is known simply as "the Cliff" — a snowy plateau with a magnificent mountain nearby.

Combat

In combat, Blizzard uses his large and powerful hands to pound his opponents into submission, followed by a vicious bite attack. As Blizzard's right arm is more powerful than his left, it can inflict more damage.

His breath weapon is a powerful cone-shaped blast of ice-air which he can emit up to 20 times per day. He must wait a round between these freezing blasts. The area is a cone 60' long and 30' wide. It causes 20d10 hp damage (a successful save vs. breath causes half damage). Those who survive have a +2 initiative penalty in the next round as they try to shake off the freezing effects.

Blizzard can also call forth and ice strike (duplicating the 5th-level priest's spellflame strike, but the damage is caused by extreme cold) up to six times per day. Initiative penalties as described with the breath weapon also apply.

He is immune to all cold and electrical damage, and only takes half damage from acid- and poison-based attacks.

Habitat/Society

Blizzard's social tendency is a solitary one. He is an enigmatic, legend-like figure, whose worshipful human followers include Tundra tribesmen, warriors, nomads, and-as the embodiment of the animal spirit-rangers, druids, and certain specialty priests and beast lords.



His roars are often heard high in the mountain ranges during terrible thunder storms. For this reason, many tribesfolk refer to him as "Thunder Lord."

At periodic intervals, usually on the evening of a new moon, the tribesmen leave offerings for him on a huge altar constructed deep within the labyrinthine glacial caves that constitute his lair.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:

Any

FREQUENCY:

Unique

ORGANIZATION:

Solitary (can summon pack)

ACTIVITY CYCLE:

All

DIET:

Carnivore

INTELLIGENCE:

Genius (17-18)

TREASURE:**ALIGNMENT:****NO. APPEARING:**

-4 (-6 when frenzied)

ARMOUR CLASS:

40

MOVEMENT:

18+12

HIT DICE:

5

THAC0:

5

NO. OF ATTACKS:

2-12/2-12/2-20/2-

DAMAGE/ATTACKS:

See below

SPECIAL ATTACKS:

See below

SPECIAL DEFENCES:

40% (60% when frenzied)

MAGIC RESISTANCE:

L (16')

SIZE:

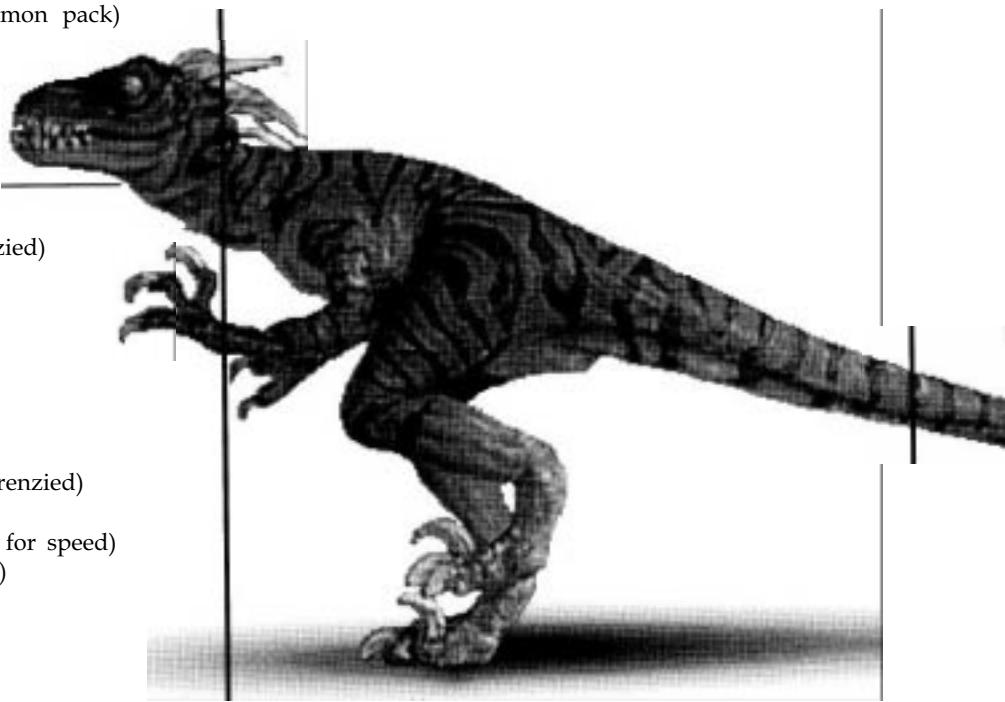
(but attacks as M for speed)

MORALE:

Champion (15-16)

XP VALUE:

17,000



For eons, Talon was the great warrior chief of the Raptor Clan on a hidden island. When the Great Meteor struck, Talon's island came into contact with the mainland and he unleashed his fury. Talon is the ultimate hunter, living for the sport of the kill. His lighting speed and raptor-like ferocity make him a fearful opponent despite his size in comparison to the other gods.

Talon and the rest of his clan now dwell deep within a heavily forested region.

Combat

In combat, Talon uses his speed and agility to frightening effect. He makes four slashes with his razor-sharp claws and follows this with an artery-ripping bite.

Unless he has been surprised, Talon will always attack first at the beginning (and only at the beginning) of any combat encounter. As a consequence of his highly acute senses, Talon is only surprised on a 1 in 10. Due to his speed in combat, he also attacks as a medium-sized creature.

After 2 rounds of normal combat, Talon can choose to send himself into a berserk frenzy for 2 rounds, during which time all his attacks are doubled, his Armor Class is lowered by 2 points, and his initiative gains a -2 bonus. When in a frenzy, on a natural attack roll of 20, his opponent is gutted-literally-for an additional 5-50 hp damage. Talon can go into this frenzy up to three times per day.

This super-raptor can also leap up to 50' onto his opponent's head to perform the dreaded cranium crusher with his powerful rear claws. This will cause 4-80 hp damage (save vs. paralyzation for half damage); over 30 hp damage in such an attack requires a second saving throw which, if failed, causes the victim to be stunned and incapacitated for 1-3 rounds due to skull damage.

Talon tracks as a 20th-level ranger.

Whenever he wishes, Talon can bellow and summon 2-8 members of his clan. The number of times he can bellow is unlimited, and the number of raptors he can summon is only limited by the number in his clan. Unfortunately, no one knows how many that is.

Habitat/Society

Talon's followers live in a perpetual state of worshipful fear. The handful of hunter-gatherer tribes that worship this king of all raptors are not immune to the ferocious appetite of their deity. He may just as likely make a meal of one of them as an outsider.

Outiders caught by his followers are blooded and made to make the "holy chase" — a run across a nine-mile stretch of dense jungle adjacent to the area where Talon and his clan dwell. They must try to get to the other side of the jungle to the relative safety of a sandy cove and the ocean beyond before being hunted down by Talon or one of the other raptors.

Talon's own raptor clan lives as a surprisingly complex society. The shape of the society is framed by tight family structures and peer groups.

Vertigo

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:

Any

FREQUENCY:

Unique

ORGANIZATION:

Solitary

ACTIVITY CYCLE:

Day

DIET:

Carnivore

INTELLIGENCE:

Genius (17-18)

TREASURE:

H

ALIGNMENT:

Chaotic Evil

NO. APPEARING:

1

ARMOUR CLASS:

-4

MOVEMENT:

25

HIT DICE:

18+12

THAC0:

4

NO. OF ATTACKS:

1-6/1-6/2-16/2-20

DAMAGE/ATTACKS:

See below

SPECIAL ATTACKS:

See below

SPECIAL DEFENCES:

70%

MAGIC RESISTANCE:

L (28')

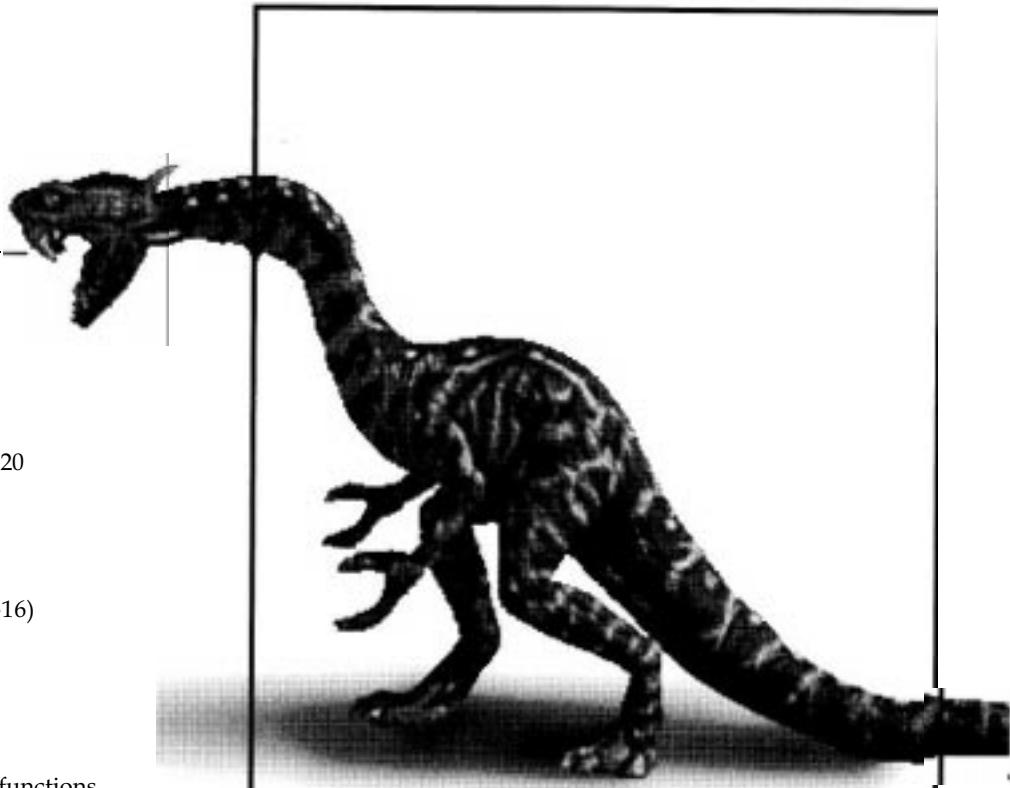
SIZE:

Champion (15-16)

MORALE:

17,000

Vertigo is a wicked cobrasaur sorceress from another dimension who was released from banishment when the Great Meteor collided with the Urth. She functions as an 18th-level mage specializing in alteration magic. She dwells in a place of insanity located in multiple dimensions and accessed through a conduit located at an ancient stone circle.



Combat

In combat, Vertigo attacks with two claws, a deadly poison-laden bite, and a powerful tail slash. If she scores a successful bite, the opponent must save vs. poison (type E). A successful save results in 20 hp damage; a failed save means instant, painful death.

In addition to her mage spell powers, she also has a number of deadly spell-like powers accessible at will. They are a scorpion sting, gaze, and acid spittle.

For the scorpion sting, she can transform her tail into an adamantine spike with which to strike opponents. The tail hits for 3-30 hp damage. A Dexterity check allows an opponent to dive out of the way, but prevents him from being able to have initiative in the following round.

Her gaze can either *hypnotize* or *petrify*. For hypnosis, the range is 50', and she can affect up to 10 individuals, who must save vs. spells at -4. The petrification has a range of 20' and can affect up to three individuals whose save vs. petrification is at -3.

Up to 10 times per day, Vertigo can spit a globule of poisonous green acid up to 100' affecting an area with a radius of 20'. This acid causes 15d10 hp damage. A successful save vs. breath weapon will reduce the damage by half.

Vertigo can also *teleport* at will, with no error.

She is completely immune to acid, poison, and magical fire. Normal fire and lightning do only half damage.

Habitat/Society

Vertigo's worshippers consist of sorcerors and witches. When the Great Meteor hit the planet and the continents were re-arranged, some ancient stone circles still remained, and it is near one of these ancient magical vortices that Vertigo founded her "Urthly" temple.

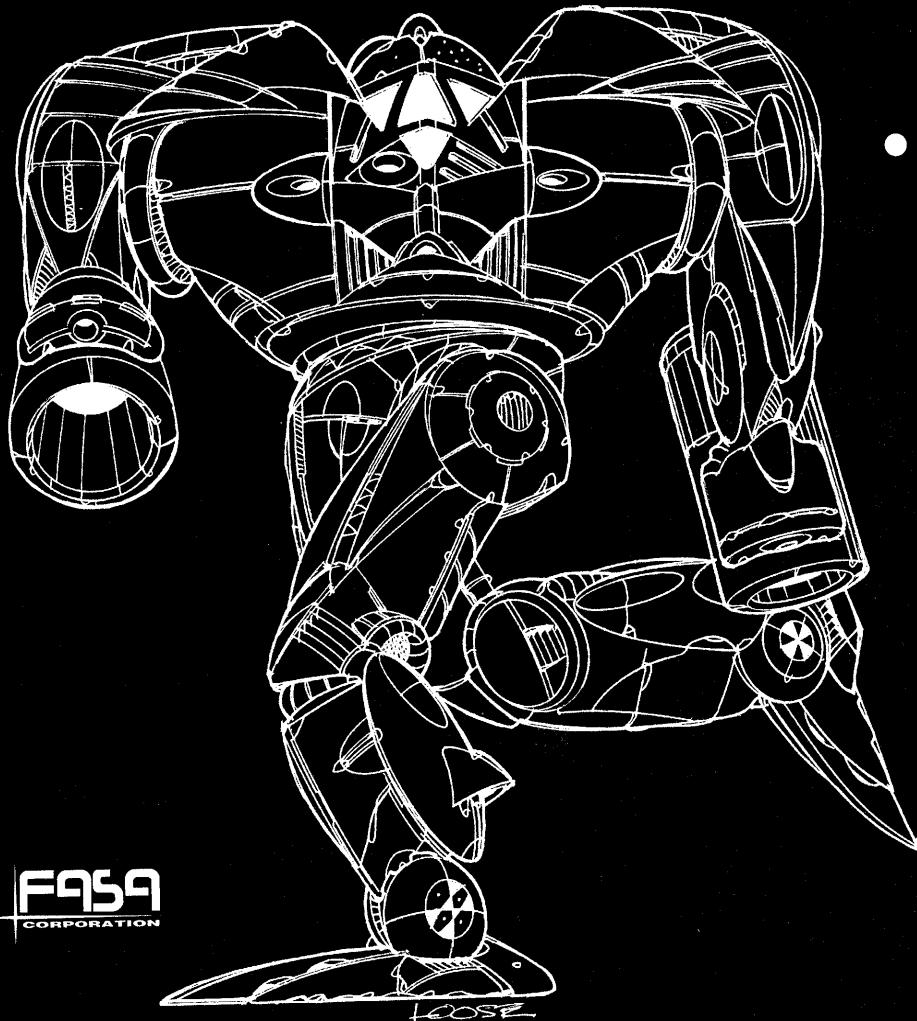
The evil cobrasaur sorceress then opened a planar conduit within the circle connecting her directly to her extra-dimensional "Temple of Insanity."

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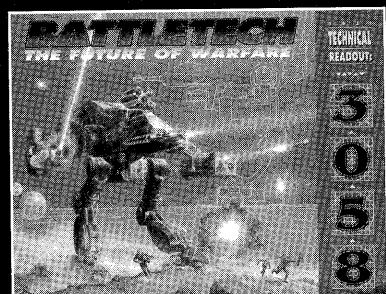
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Magical Effect Cards

by Lester Smith

Artwork by Chris Adams

The DRAGON DICE™ game can be played with any number of people, and the basic set includes banner cards to keep track of whose armies are whose. But keeping track of magic is another matter entirely, one generally left to each player who casts a particular spell. In the heat of battle, however, when several players are involved, when spells are flying hither and yon, and when special action icons are interrupting play, it can be difficult to remember just how many points of *ash storm*, for instance, are afflicting a particular terrain.

Not to worry. Ever vigilant in our labor to make your life easy—and your fun fast and furious—we have designed a set of magical effect cards to keep track of spells and dragon breath. The spell cards mark just how many points of which spells are in play, who cast that magic, and when it expires. The dragon breath cards are used to mark any lingering breath effects on an army. You can find the magical effect cards on pages 32 and 33 of this magazine. (You will need to cut them out before play, and you may wish to mount them on cardboard or even laminate them.)

Both types of cards include their description on their face, for easy reference.

Each player should bring one set of cards to the game, along with a set of tokens distinctive to that player.

With these cards and markers in play, there should never be any confusion as to what magical effects are on the table, and who is responsible for them. Now everyone will know, at a glance, exactly who to punish for those *dancing lights* and *ash storms*.

Spell Cards

When a spell is cast, the player lays that spell card next to the target unit, army, or terrain, and places on the card a number of tokens equal to the number of times the spell is multiplied. (For instance, if you're using white buttons for counters and have cast two transmute rock to mud spells on an opponent's army, lay the transmute rock to mud spell card next to the affected army, and then place two white buttons on the card.) Don't forget to even put a marker on a spell such as *burning hands*,

to indicate who cast that spell.

At the very beginning and very end of his turn, a player should look around the table to note where he has spell cards and markers, check to see which of those spells expire, and remove those cards and markers from the table. (Most spells expire at the beginning of a turn, but the watery double spell lasts until the turn's end.)

Dragon Breath Cards

Just like spell cards that target armies, dragon breath cards are placed on the affected army as a reminder of lingering magical effects. But because their duration is tied to the affected army, dragon breath cards require no identifying token. The one exception is when a dragon breathes on another dragon, in which case place a token belonging to the player whose turn is next on the card.

Got it?

Then turn to
page 32!

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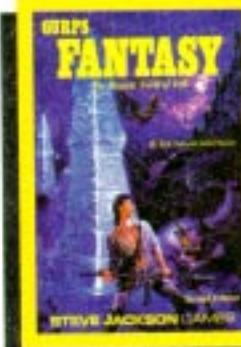
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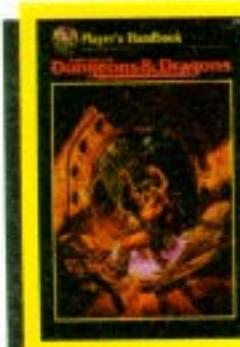
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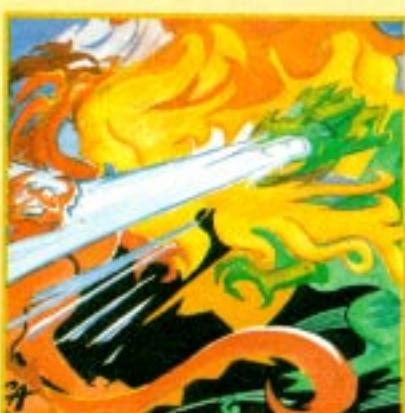
Wraiths \$

**Stoneskin**

Add 1 automatic save to the target army until the beginning of your next turn.

**Transmute Rock to Mud**

Subtract 6 from the maneuver rolls of the target army until the beginning of your next turn.

**Dragon Breath**

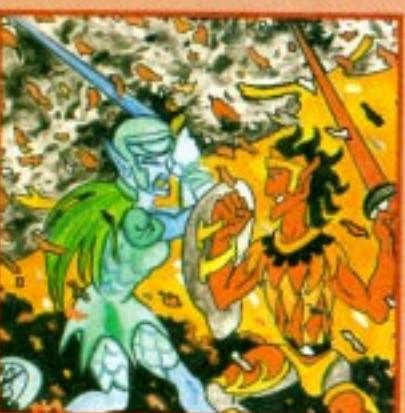
Against another dragon, dragon breath negates the usual 5 saves until the end of the next player's turn. (Place a token of that player's on this card.)

**Stoneskin**

Add 1 automatic save to the target army until the beginning of your next turn.

**Ash Storm**

Subtract 1 from all armies' rolls at the target terrain until your next turn.

**Ash Storm**

Subtract 1 from all armies' rolls at the target terrain until your next turn.

**Open Grave**

Until the beginning of your next turn, all units killed in 1 of your armies go to your reserves rather than to the dead unit area. (Multiple castings affect multiple armies.)

**Burning Hands**

Double 1 unit's melee results until the beginning of your next turn. (Multiple castings affect multiple units.)

**Dancing Lights**

The target army's missiles and magic results are halved until the beginning of your next turn. (This spell may not be multiplied.)

**Watery Double**

Give 1 automatic save to the target army until the end of your next turn.

**Wall of Fog**

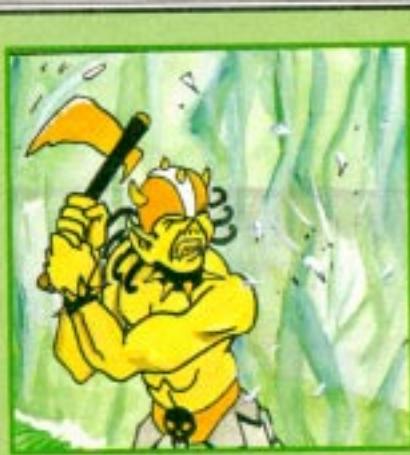
Halve (rounding down) all maneuver rolls at the target terrain, and all missile fire into or out of it, until the beginning of your next turn. (This spell may not be multiplied.)

**Dragon Breath: Frost**

All rolls made by the target army (or any of its individual units) are halved until the end of its next turn.

**Wind Walk**

Target army gains 6 automatic maneuver results until the beginning of your next turn.

**Wall of Ice**

Give an army 3 automatic saves until the beginning of your next turn.

**Palsy**

The target army suffers a penalty of -1 to all its rolls until the beginning of your next turn. (Example: 12 hits reduce to 11, 7 saves reduce to 6 etc.)

**Dragon Breath: Paralysis**

The target army may roll for nothing but saves until the end of its next turn.

**Wall of Ice**

Give an army 3 automatic saves until the beginning of your next turn.

**Palsy**

The target army suffers a penalty of -1 to all its rolls until the beginning of your next turn. (Example: 12 hits reduce to 11, 7 saves reduce to 6, etc.)

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Ring of Assimilation

These rings always appear as a plain band of electrum with an empty setting. Alone, the ring radiates a weak dweomer, detectable by the usual magical means. However, the ring's true power is revealed when another magical item is placed within the empty setting. Of course, such an item must be small enough to fit in the setting.

When so placed, the fitted magical item projects its powers through the *ring of assimilation*, as if the magical device had been created as a magical ring instead of its actual form. As such, the ring-wearer can utilize (or suffer from) the powers of the magical item, just as he would use any other form of ring. For example, the wearer could place an *ioun stone* into the ring's setting, and benefit from its powers without the need to have it orbit his head.

Typical magical items that can fit in the empty setting of a *ring of assimilation* include *ioun stones*, *pearls of power*, *pearls of wisdom*, and the like. Some judgement must be used on the part of both the DM and the player (e.g., a *bead of force* or a bead from a *necklace of missiles* could fit the setting, but would be useless, and possibly dangerous, if carried thus).

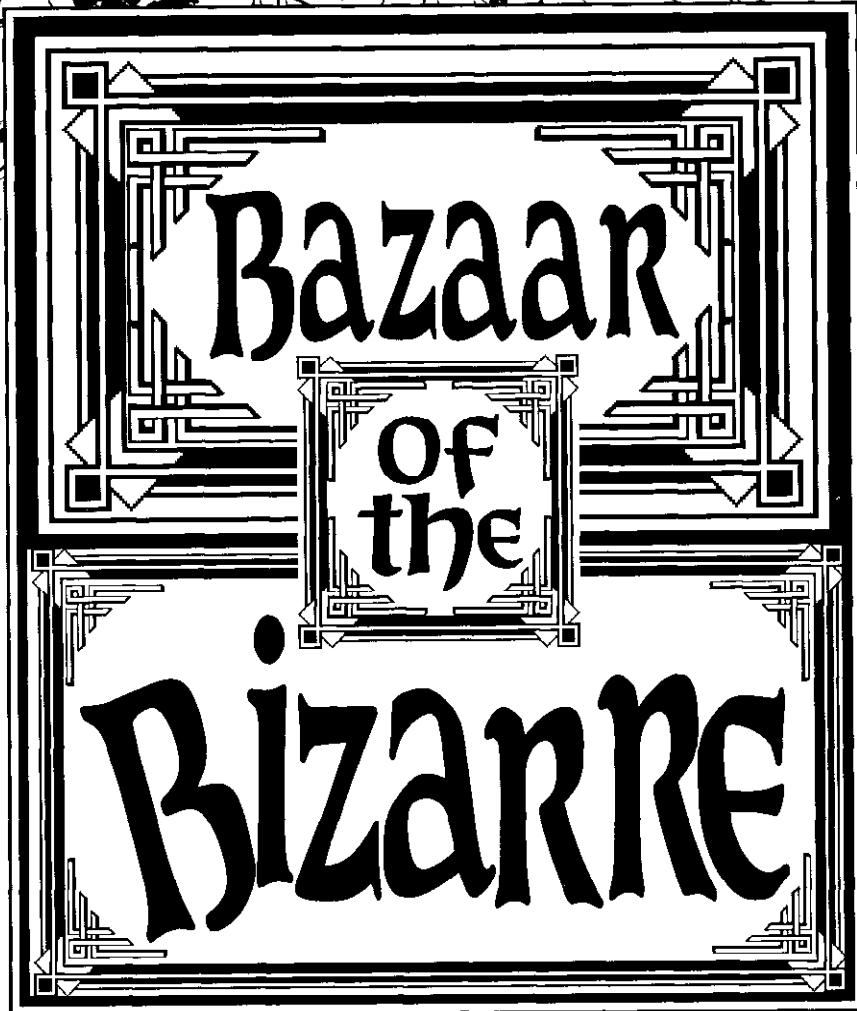
In order for a *ring of assimilation* to hold a magical item in its setting, it must be worn on a finger. If it is removed, or the owner attempts to place an item in the setting without slipping on the ring, the magical object simply falls out. Also, only magical items can be placed in the setting; nonmagical items will fall out as above.

XP Value: 4,000

Ring of Autonomy

Rings of this sort function in a manner akin to a *ring of mind shielding*. When this ring is worn, the wearer is rendered invulnerable to all forms of mind control or mental influence, both magical and psionic. Such effects cannot penetrate the mental defenses imparted by the ring. A *ring of autonomy* does not prevent normal mental contact, such as *ESP*, *telepathy*, and so forth. Only effects that actually compel the wearer to act against his will (e.g., *charm person*, *suggestion*, etc.) are prevented.

XP Value: 1,000



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Ring of Cages

When placed on the finger of a living creature (the wearer must actually be alive; it will not function for undead, golems, etc.), this ring turns invisible and cannot be detected by any means, including *detect invisibility*, *true seeing*, or even by touch. If the wearer dies, or the ring is removed from the wearer's finger, it becomes visible once again.

Believed to have been devised by multi-classed mage/thieves, this ring allows the wearer to open any door, gate, or other entrance to a cell, cage, or similar place used to hold prisoners. Likewise, restraints loosen and fall away from a prisoner, shackles spring open, a stocks unlock, and so forth. To execute this power, the ring-wearer need only make contact with the appropriate portal or restraint.

The ring cannot be used to simply open a door or untie knots; the purpose or function of the affected object must be to bind or imprison an individual. For example, the ring-wearer could open a door to a prison cell, but not the door to the prison building itself. Similarly, the ring-wearer could cause a bound victim to be immediately free of his restraints, but could not make the knot of a rope unravel if the rope is not being used to secure a hostage or prisoner.

In addition, the ring cannot free a victim caught in a *temporal stasis* or *imprisonment* spell, but it can open a *prison of Zagyg* or a *forcecage* spell.

Note that despite all of its uses, the power conveyed by a *ring of cages* is not a *knock* spell or a *chime of opening*. And while a *ring of cages* is most useful in allowing the wearer to free prisoners, its intent is to free the wearer from such situations.

XP Value: 2,000

Ring of Life

These rings typically store 5d4 charges. When slipped on a finger, the wearer is rendered immune to all effects that drain life levels, including spells, magical devices, undead, and so forth. Instead of affecting the wearer, the level-draining absorbs charges from the ring at a rate of 1 charge per level drained. If the ring does not have sufficient charges to prevent the loss of levels, the wearer is subject to the excess. For example, if a *ring of life* has five charges remaining, and its wearer is touched by a vampire three times (each touch draining two levels), the ring prevents the first five levels from being drained (by giving up its five charges), but the wearer loses the sixth level normally. (Creatures who become more powerful by draining levels continue to do so, as the energy taken from the ring is an adequate substitute.) When all of the ring's charges are used, it crumbles to dust. A *ring of life* cannot be recharged.

XP Value: 2,000

Ring of Might

Legend has it that the first ring of this sort was created by four wizards working in unison, each wizard a specialist in one of the four elemental disciplines. It is further believed that these four wizards were somehow related-siblings, perhaps-as the natural opposition between elementalists would prevent such cooperation otherwise.

Only a dozen or so of these potent rings are believed to exist, as the secret of their creation died with the four wizards and any apprentices they may have had. Nevertheless, wizards everywhere continue their efforts to rediscover the process.

A *ring of might* can be used only by characters of the wizard class, both generalist and specialist varieties. When slipped on a finger and the proper command word is spoken, the ring can produce the following powers and effects, once per day each, one at a time:

Dehydration: When the command word is spoken, the ring-wearer causes all liquids and moisture within a 10' cube to instantly evaporate. This effect can be cast out to a range of 50 yards, and has an instantaneous effect.

This effect would cause a pool of water to vanish immediately, muddy earth would become dry and cracked, plants would turn brown and crumble, the air within the cube would become parched, and so forth. Creatures within the area receive a saving throw vs. spells. If the throw fails, they die due to the evaporation of all bodily fluids, becoming nothing more than desiccated husks. Even if the save is made, however, a creature still loses half its remaining hit points, as some dehydration occurs. This power will not harm creatures who do not possess bodily fluids.

Shatter rock: By speaking the proper command word, the ring-wearer causes a 10' cubic area of stone to blow apart in a cloud of fine powder or gravel. The power can be hurled out to a range of 50 yards, and has an instantaneous duration.

With this power, the ring-wearer could blast a stone golem to dust, pulverize a section of castle wall, destroy a stone support column, and the like. In fact, if the ring-wearer wins initiative in a combat situation, thrown or catapulted boulders can be picked out of the air, before they can impact upon their targets. (Note that in this last example, the ring-wearer can only destroy multiple boulders if they happen to be in the 10' cubic area at the same time.) Sentient rock creatures within the cube receive a save vs. spells. If the save succeeds, the creature withstands the magic and does not suffer any damage. If the save fails, the creature is blasted apart as above. Obviously, this power is useless if directed against creatures and objects not composed of stone or rock.

Solidify air: With the appropriate command word, the wearer causes the air in a stationary, 10' cubic area to become as

firm and unyielding as solid rock. This effect can be generated out to a distance of 50 yards, and will last as long as the ring-wearer maintains concentration. All creatures within this area are trapped and unable to speak, move, or do anything more than think.

Also, trapped creatures cannot breath (the air is solid, and as such, it cannot be inhaled), and they will die of suffocation if the ring-wearer maintains the magic for an extended duration. (Note that the length of time a creature can survive without air is dependent upon the creature in question. The DM must decide the exact length of time any given creature can survive without air.) This effect not only traps creatures within its area, it prevents creatures without from entering the area. Furthermore, trapped creatures cannot be harmed by forces outside the area, as they are encased in solid "matter." Creatures who do not breathe, or are not required to breathe in order to survive, are not susceptible to the suffocation effect, though the immobility still applies. This power offers no saving throw to its victims.

Spontaneous combustion: When the command word is uttered, the ring-wearer ignites all flammable objects and creatures within a stationary, 10' cube. The effect can be cast out to a range of 50 yards and lasts for one full turn (but does not require concentration on the part of the wearer). The fire inflicts 5d4 hp damage on the first and second round, 4d4 on the third and fourth round, 3d4 on the fifth and sixth, 2d4 on the seventh and eighth, and 1d4 hp damage on the ninth and tenth round, going out thereafter (a total of 30d4).

A saving throw vs. spells is required at the end of each round, and if any such roll is successful, the fire goes out without inflicting further damage to the creature (the fire continues to burn other creatures and items that have not made successful saving throws). Such a save does not negate or reduce any damage sustained previously, however. Items save vs. magical fire; if successful, the flames go out as above. Any item or creature slain or destroyed by these flames is reduced to ashes. (The fire cannot spread outside its area of effect, unless someone, or something, is moved out of the area and comes in contact with other flammable material. In this case, the flames become normal fire, inflicting but 1d4 hp damage per round, and can be extinguished normally. Otherwise, the fire can be snuffed only by *dispel magic*, a *wand of flame extinguishing*, etc.)

Creatures entering the area of effect after the power is activated burst into flames, but the damage is determined by the round the creature enters (e.g., if a creature enters in the fourth round, the damage is 4d4 for that round, 3d4 for the next two, and so forth). These flames do not harm creatures or objects that are

immune to fire or heat.

Due to the extreme rarity of these rings, DMs should require a character to spend a lot of time, money, and favors to learn its properties. An *identify* spell should be severely limited in the information it reveals, perhaps only disclosing that the ring is somehow connected to the elements. *Legend Lore* and more powerful spells may function normally, at the DM's discretion.

In the event that a PC attempts to create a *ring of might*, the XP Value has been given for the DM's convenience, just in case the PC is allowed to be successful in the undertaking. It is suggested that constructing a *ring of might* be even more tedious than learning the powers of one (after all, four elemental wizard specialists were required to create the first one).

XP Value: 5,000

Ring of Obstruction

This ring is the bane of all spell-users, and once it is put on, it cannot be taken off without the use of a *remove curse*. When worn by a spellcasting creature, a *ring of obstruction* severs the link between the spellcaster and the source of his magic, preventing him from casting any spells whatsoever, for as long as the ring is worn.

In the case of clerics, druids, paladins, rangers, or any being who receives spells through prayer, a "barrier" comes into existence, which prevents contact between the worshipper and the deity, and disallows access to spells. Such beings are likely to believe that they have somehow offended their patron, not even realizing that a cursed ring is the culprit.

In the case of wizards, bards, or other creatures who gain spells via studying spellbooks, a mental block separates them from the spells they desire to cast (they cannot recall the proper words, gestures, and so forth). Such spellcasters are more likely to suspect an outside influence (though not necessarily the cause), rather than blame the effects on some personal failing.

A *ring of obstruction* does not prevent the ring-wearer from reading spell scrolls or utilizing magical devices. It simply impedes the wearer's ability to cast spells. Obviously, this ring is harmless when worn by non-spellcasters, and may be easily removed from the finger of such a being.

Rings of obstruction typically have some minor power common among other magical rings (e.g., *protection*, *warmth*, etc.) to make it appear useful under the scrutiny of a spell such as *identify*. Such powers immediately vanish when the ring is placed on a finger, however.

XP Value: Nil

Ring of Shields

When this ring is slipped on a finger and the proper command word is uttered, a circular plane of force is created, which the ring-wearer may use to parry blows in combat, just as if he were wielding an actual shield. As such, the Armor Class of the wearer is improved by 1.

The circle of force energy centers on the ring itself, and has a diameter appropriate to the size of its user. Once invoked, the force-shield will remain in existence indefinitely, but the wielder cannot use the shield-hand to perform other functions, as it is necessary to "hold" the shield. A second command word causes the shield to disperse, as will removal of the ring.

A *ring of shields* conveys a second benefit to its wearer. If a *disintegrate* spell is cast on the wearer, and the force-shield is active, the *disintegrate* spell automatically destroys the force shield (and the ring, unless a successful save vs. disintegration is rolled) instead of affecting the wearer. Most agree that the loss of the rings is a small price to pay for one's life.

XP Value: 750

Ring of Swords

These potent rings are typically constructed of unadorned platinum, though other materials are used on occasion. When a command word is spoken, the ring produces a "sword" in the wearer's hand (the hand that wears the ring), which the wearer can wield as a weapon, inflicting 3d4 points of damage with each successful hit. The type of sword created varies from ring to ring, but most *sword rings* conjure one of the following examples:

Cold sword: This ring produces a sword of pure cold energy (not ice). The actual "blade" of the *cold sword* does not have a physical form, though the airspace it occupies seems to ripple, and when subjected to warm temperatures, it emits an icy vapor, which clearly outlines its length. The sword conveys *cold resistance* (as *fire resistance*, but with regards to cold-based attacks) to its wielder. Against fire- and heat-based creatures, a *ring of cold swords* inflicts 6d4 hp damage with each successful hit, but is entirely harmless against cold creatures.

Fire sword: This ring produces a sword of crackling flame (color may vary), which produces light equal to a torch. In damp conditions, the flame will sputter and hiss, but will not go out. The sword can be used to ignite flammable materials (e.g., paper, oil, clothing, etc.), melt ice, and so forth. The sword imparts *fire resistance* (as the ring) to its user. When used as a weapon against cold creatures, the *ring of fire swords* inflicts 6d4 points of damage per blow, but cannot harm fire creatures at all.

Force sword: This ring produces a sword of invisible force energy. Upon impact with a target, the *force sword* becomes visible, but only for the brief



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moment that contact is made. It is entirely silent, and due to its transparency, the wielder gains a +4 bonus to hit when first used against a particular opponent, and a +2 bonus to hit for each attack thereafter, when used against the same opponent. The *force sword* can pass through other force energy effects (e.g., *wall of force*, *shield*, etc.) without being hindered, though no harm is brought upon the sword or the other effect. However, powers and effects that can halt or destroy force energy (e.g., *disintegrate*, *wand of force*, etc.) are effective against a *ring of force swords*.

Lightning sword: This ring produces a sword of lightning, which emits a menacing hum and sheds a glow equal to a *light* spell. The sword conveys *electricity resistance* (as *fire resistance*, but with regards to electricity-based attack forms) upon its wielder. When used as a weapon, the wielder receives a +4 bonus to hit creatures composed of metal, or who are wearing metal armor. Similarly, the sword inflicts 6d4 points of damage to creatures who have a high susceptibility to electrical attacks, but is otherwise harmless to creatures of an electrical nature. In no case can the damage inflicted by a *lightning sword* be conducted to creatures other than the target creature.

(Note that the powers and effects conveyed by *sword rings* apply only if the ring is active.)

When found, a *ring of swords* contains 5d10 charges, each sufficient to activate the ring for 1 turn. The wearer may attack with the sword in the same round that it is conjured, though the activation time increases the ring-wearer's initiative dice by 1.

Other types of *sword rings* certainly exist, though DMs must develop such devices themselves. Similarly, it is quite possible that certain *rings of swords* can produce more than one type of sword (but they could not be active at the same time), though such specimens should be extremely rare indeed.

XP Value: 2,000 (+1,000/additional sword-type produced)

Ring of Timelessness

When this ring is worn, a limited form of immortality is bestowed upon the wearer, who immediately ceases to age (biologically), never growing older, so long as the ring is worn. This power does not render the wearer immune to death, however. The ring-wearer can be killed by spells, physical blows, disease, starvation, drowning, poisoning, and so forth. The wearer simply cannot die of old age, and will continue to live for centuries, so long as other death-dealing conditions are avoided.

A *ring of timelessness* also conveys immunity to all effects that increase or decrease the wearer's biological age. Thus, the aging effect of a ghost would not harm the ring-wearer, nor would the age-reducing magic of a *potion of longevity*.

There is one drawback to wearing such a ring, however. Once it is placed on a finger, it cannot be removed—ever. A *ring of timelessness* effectively merges with the flesh of the wearer, and cannot be separated from it, even if a *wish* is used, the finger is severed, and the like. Only the death of the wearer allows the ring to be removed.

Finally, a *ring of timelessness* has a terrible danger that few ever realize (most owners die by other means long before they must face this hazard). Most mortal creatures do not possess the mental fortitude necessary to exist beyond their normal lifespan. As such, when the wearer of a *ring of timelessness* reaches an age twice the normal maximum for his species, a saving throw vs. spells is rolled. If the save is successful, nothing occurs. If the save fails, however, the ring-wearer goes insane. (Assume that this reflects the wearer's inability to cope with the realities of an extended life, such as outliving one's descendants, accumulating more knowledge than one's mind can organize, etc.) This saving throw is repeated each time the ring-wearer ages a number of years equal to the maximum lifespan of his species. Due to their naturally prolonged lives, dragons, elves, and other creatures with a normal life expectancy of 1000 years or more are exempt from this danger, as it is assumed that the mental patterns of such creatures are accustom to long life.

A *ring of timelessness* is useless for creatures who do not age or who already possess immortality (e.g., undead, other-planar beings, golems, etc.).

XP Value: 5,000

Ω

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Letters

Continued from page 4

I would also like to see a Best of DRAGON Magazine Adventures with updated story lines and 2nd Edition statistics. I'm sure this would be a mammoth undertaking; perhaps it could be a joint effort with the staff members of DRAGON Magazine and DUNGEON® Adventures? It is something I would love to see, as the old Dragon Magazines with the adventures are extremely difficult to come by.

Conrad Geist
Ft. Morgan, CO

In your first paragraph, you touched on something very near and dear to this editor's heart: manuscript submissions. The first step in any submission process is, of course, honing your writing skills, as you've said. This means the basics such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar, but also more complex matters like manuscript formatting (double-spaced 12-point or 10-pitch type, etc.) and idea organization. No one should try to submit an idea to DRAGON Magazine (or to DUNGEON

Adventures, for that matter) without getting a copy of our writers' guidelines. We aren't even allowed to look at proposals or submissions that aren't accompanied by TSR's release form (which comes with the guidelines). Another hint for you and anyone else interested in writing for us: send proposals rather than complete manuscripts. If we think we can use the idea, we'll ask you to send it and then we'll decide.

As to a joint effort with the staff members of DRAGON Magazine and DUNGEON Adventures... ah, take a look at the mastheads of the two magazines sometime. We all do double duty here. Pierce Watters is our overall Editor-in-Chief; Dave Gross, editor of DUNGEON Adventures, is our assistant editor; I'm assistant editor of DUNGEON Adventures; Michelle Vuckovich is editorially indispensable for both magazines as well; and the horribly overworked Larry Smith does the art and layout for both (that means some months two magazines at a time). We all keep aspirin in our desk drawers.

First Quest™

Continued from page 8

warehouse at FGU where my very first task was sticking black and white FGU labels on the Phoenix Games editions of Aftermath* when FGU picked up the rights to publish that game. (Aftermath was written by Bob Charrette and Paul Hume, who were later the lead designers and my co-authors on Shadowrun' and got me involved in that project.)

Perhaps the most important thing that I got to do when working and gaming around Waterloo Hobbies was playtest the second edition of Villains and Vigilantes. We had only been gaming together a short period of time when Jeff Dee slipped us a partially handwritten copy of the rules and asked us what we thought. Because of that, one of my earliest exposures in gaming was deconstructing and analyzing the how's and why's of an evolving game system. (From that point on I and most of the gaming group had little qualms about changing or "fixing" rule sets to get them to work the way we wanted them to for the game we were running. The structure and direction of the game system and how it helped or hindered the story in the game we were playing became a prime element of consideration. From then on I

don't think we used a single game system straight out of the box, and often used a variation of a completely unrelated rules set for a game of our own devising.) I even wrote the second adventure to come out for the second edition of V&V; it was called F.O.R.C.E.*, and you can still find it knocking around on the dusty back-shelves of game stores today. (By the way, not to name names, but you can also blame V&V for starting off a number of key people at a certain Lupine Game Company. Blame it all on Jeff Dee...)

I'm sure that if we'd played that first game of AD&D® at Dan's house, mine, Caroline's, or anywhere else, I'd have remained involved as a gamer. But because that first game was at Waterloo Hobbies and because the people there were open to the opinions and untested talents of a teenager, I got to learn about the industry and write in it. The connections and friendships I made then all pushed me forward to here. So thanks to everyone involved, especially to those I barely get to speak with anymore.

And if you happen to be in Waterloo Hobbies now on Willis Avenue in Wiliston Park Long Island or the other Waterloo in Tempe, Arizona, and you run into Scott, Sylvia, or Leon, thank them for me. I'm not sure I ever have. (Thanks!)

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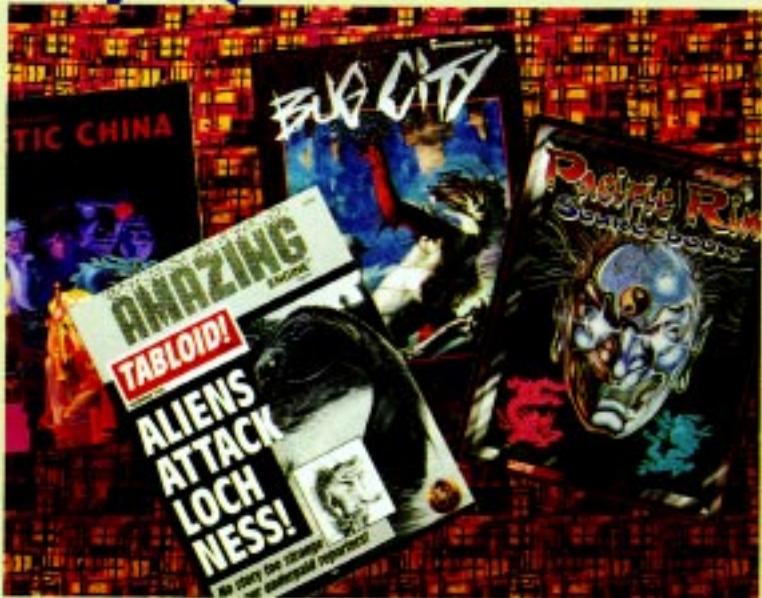
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Role-Playing Reviews



Strange destination

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Are you bored with your campaign world? Does the discovery of yet another lost civilization make your eyes glaze over? Do haunted crypts seem about as threatening as day care centers? Have you heard yourself muttering, "If I've seen one booby-trapped, treasure-strewn, monster-infested dungeon, I've seen 'em all"?

Resist the urge to toss your character sheet in the nearest dumpster. You don't need a new hobby. You just need a vacation, preferably somewhere you've never been before, somewhere as far away from your regular world as you can get.

This month, we'll take a look at several offbeat destinations, each as peculiar as a five-sided die, guaranteed to breathe life into the stodgiest campaign. And though

they're all system-specific, associated with games you may never have played, you

Role-playing games' rating

Not recommended



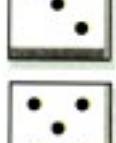
May be useful



Fair



Good



Excellent



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can always adapt them to your favorite RPG. Just ignore the printed statistics, make a few nips and tucks, and add as many of your own ideas as you like. Remember, as long as the rest of your group is willing, anything goes, from cyberpunks in medieval Japan to spell casters in contemporary Chicago. Why be straightjacketed by the conventions of a particular genre? Maybe that's why you got bored in the first place.

Bug City

Shadowrun® game supplement
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FASA Corporation
Design: Robert Cruz, Tom Dowd, Mike Nystul, Diane Piron-Gelman, and Christopher Kubasik

Development: Tom Dowd
Editing: Donna Ippolito

Illustrations: Jim Nelson, Tom Baxa, Peter Bergting, Joel Biske, Earl Geier, Jeff Laubenstein, Larry MacDougall, and Jeff Miracola
Cover: Rick Berry and Mike Nielsen

I've read many a Shadowrun supplement (two dozen? three dozen?), but this is the first one that made me laugh out loud. Though Bug City retains all of the elements dear to the hearts of cyberpunks—out-of-control governments, maniacal corporations, netrunning renegades—it boasts a premise so delightfully absurd, I bet the designers were rolling around the floor, holding their sides while they were thinking it up. In the near-future, it seems, the meta-planets will spew forth a tidal wave of insect spirits across Chicago, resulting in a landscape that's, er, crawling with giant bugs. We're talking Schwarzenegger-sized cicadas and mosquitoes as big as billboards. It's as nutty as it sounds, Cyberpunk by way of B-movies. And because it's drenched in magic, Bug City is theoretically compatible with most fantasy campaigns. AD&D®, meet King Cockroach!

To get to the good stuff, however, first you have to wade through 30-plus pages of introduction, much of it in the form of on-line computer blather. ("Maybe this disaster'll finally teach us to pull together, at least for a little while..." "Dream on... racial bigotry is part of the air..." "No! We can't let it be like this. We have a common enemy.") To their credit, the designers go easy on the cyberslang—a chronic annoyance in the Shadowrun line-limiting themselves to the occasional "frag" and "chummer." And when they're not preoccupied with chit-chat, they score with vivid images and deadpan observations, certain to make you look twice. ("...many unfortunate people trapped in the Zone have had to resort to cannibalism to survive already, making them less resistant to life as a ghoul."). Overall, the illustrations are first-rate (check that cover) but the maps leave a lot to be desired, which the designers more or less admit. "Our best efforts cannot



compare to what mapmaking professionals can accomplish." Hey, guys, don't be so negative-next time, just apply yourselves!

Once past the introduction, the book comes alive, presenting a riveting look at a besieged community that's half ant farm, half leper colony. Illuminating essays explain how Chicago evolved from a portage site for fur traders into a city of ghetto-like subdivisions, some housing orcs and trolls, others holding dwarves and elves. On an August afternoon, the city was forever changed when the spirit swarm arose from the Shattergraves, an area filled with rubble from the collapsed Sears Tower. The spirits needed physical hosts and found them on the streets; within weeks, Michigan Avenue joggers were sprouting antennae, and pincer-faced stockbrokers were cuddling up with their larvae girlfriends. The government responded by declaring Chicago a disaster area and isolating it from the rest of the country. As of now, a million people and who knows how many mutant insects remain trapped within the "Containment Zone."

To put it mildly, the Windy City ain't what it used to be. Well-rendered details evoke an atmosphere of chaos, paranoia, and impending doom. Government personnel guard the Wall, a barrier of compressed debris, tossing concussion grenades at would-be escapees. Ghosts roam concrete mazes beneath the Shattergraves. Black marketeers peddle cyberdecks and spell foci to desperate citizens.

As for the bugs, they're thoroughbred creeps, interested only in eating and breeding. Ants as large as cars scavenge for live humans to present to their queen. Roach-men live in garbage dumps and feast on rotten corpses. Mutant mosquitoes, the vampires of Bug City, not only drain their victims of blood but infect them with malaria. PCs will find themselves dodging venomous beetles in Ghoultown, swatting firefly spirits in Cook County Hospital, and struggling to stay alive in a metropolis more hospitable to wasp nests than town houses. In any face-off between human and insect, bet on the bug.

The game mastering section provides excellent staging tips and a terrific set of optional rules, covering the sale of rare merchandise (with prices determined by simple formulas), effects of radiation (characters make Body Tests to avoid poisoning), and Zone magic (insect totems, spirit conjuring, astral pollution). A gallery of memorable NPCs—I especially like Tamir Grey, an advocate of civil rights for ghouls—makes the absence of an adventure all the more frustrating. Couldn't the designers have trimmed some of the on-line chatter and given us a scenario or two?

Evaluation: As good as it is, *Bug City* would've benefited from more development. Each insect species receives just a page or so of description, far too little to adequately cover their life cycles, social structures, and personalities. (The mos-

quitoes deserve a book of their own.) Too often, the designers introduce an intriguing concept, then walk away from it; what's the deal, for instance, with the toxic shamans "who worship the totem of the sanitary canals and the waste dumps"? Shadowrun devotees who want to incorporate the material into an "official" campaign may have to do some homework; the text makes reference to nearly a dozen Shadowrun sourcebooks, including previous insect spirit adventures like *Queen Euphoria* and *Double Exposure*.

Still, a cast of characters this engaging makes *Bug City* hard to resist. A glance at the illustration on page 81, showing a hapless human impaled on the proboscis of a slobbering mosquito-man, ought to fire the imagination of even the most jaded player. For intellectuals, the insect motif serves as wry commentary on the hive mentality of urban society. For the rest of us, it provides the opportunity to squish giant roaches with Army tanks. Bring on the pesticide—I'm ready for *Bug City II*.

Mystic China

Ninjas and Superspies*

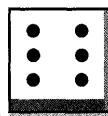
game supplement 208-page softcover book

Palladium Books \$20

Design: Erick Wujcik with Kevin Siembieda

Editing: Kevin Siembieda with Alex Marciniszyn, James A. Osten, Kevin Kirsten, and Julius Rosenstein

Illustrations: Vince Martin, Wayne Breaux, Jr., Kevin Long, and Roger Petersen
Cover: James Steranko



Never played Ninjas and Superspies? Doesn't matter. Never been a fan of Palladium Books? Doesn't matter. If you have even the slightest interest in Oriental settings or the mildest curiosity about the magic of the Far East, you owe it to yourself to investigate *Mystic China*, a virtuosic blend of fact and fancy.

Erick Wujcik belongs to an elite group of designers (which also includes Aaron Allston and Mike Pondsmith) who seem incapable of writing a dull paragraph. The author of the revolutionary *Amber Diceless Role-Playing** game, Wujcik has a mutant-like ability for explaining complicated ideas in simple language. Ever heard of a martial art form called *Tien Hsueh*? Me neither. But Wujcik makes it clear with a single sentence: "If you've ever hit the funny bone in your elbow or knee, then you already know what *Tien Hsueh* is all about." His introduction to the Demon Hunter character class reads like a classified ad: "Wanted: Loud-Mouthed Big-Muscled Jerk. In need of someone who takes risks, bets against the odds, and is a good loser." The breezy, playful style makes the entire book a joy.

In fact, *Mystic China* is so compelling that I was three-quarters of the way through before I noticed there weren't any maps.

Mystic China isn't much concerned with specific locations or—for that matter—geography of any kind. Instead, it takes its cue from Taoism, which Wujcik describes as "something like a philosophy, something like a religion, and more than a little like some kind of formal insanity." Clearly, what attracts Wujcik to Taoism is its eccentricity; he uses it as an excuse to hop from topic to topic like a kid on the loose in Disneyland.

Both the volume and quality of the material is staggering. Subjects as diverse as international exchange rates and Chinese checkers are addressed with contagious enthusiasm. The Oriental symbol table, useful for generating character names, contains close to 100 entries, complete with background notes; *jiao*, for instance, means "glue," making it a good name for someone who helps keep his community together. A discussion of the Antiquarian, an elderly collector of books and antiques, features a 20-room description of his mansion. Wujcik's penchant for research—he cites 21 references in the appendix—shows up in the sections on economics and weaponry. Player characters may contemplate the effects of a recession on the value of jade miniatures, or channel funds to their dead ancestors by burning Hell Money. An enterprising assassin might carry a *bian* (bamboo whip), an *er neu* (multi-shot crossbow), and a *pao hasio* (metal flute with a spring-loaded razor).

The imaginative magic rules make the systems in, say, the *Bushido** and *Land of the Rising Sun** games look like rough drafts. A character with psychic talents—who, in a liberal campaign, can be just about anyone—has access to energy streams that allow him to manipulate supernatural forces. A blind character, while unable to see ordinary people, may be able to perceive the movement of ghosts; with his Third Eye, he can sense spiritual auras and divine the memories of a dead man. The Immortalist specializes in a form of celestial calligraphy called *tao shih*, where spells are stored on magical paper with elemental inks. (Blue ink corresponds to the element of wood, white ink to metal. Blue paper is used to communicate with Immortals, glossy black evokes the Yama Kings of Hell.) Chi magic, a concept familiar to *Rifts** game players, involves a complex yet logical hierarchy of life forces, physical simulacrum, and mental disciplines. You want spells? You want bizarre spells? Try *exhale electrostatic fog*, *ride the yin tiger*, and *spit dragon pearl*. Players more interested in karate chops should have a field day with the martial arts chapter, which describes a host of special techniques (finger snaps to disrupt an opponent's inner ear) and body hardening exercises (sleeping in a pile of bodies to help control revulsion). Optional skills include yarrow stick counting (a type of fortune telling), calligraphic

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forgery, and begging. Clever staging tips show novices how to make their characters exotic and inscrutable; instead of a player saying, "I am unworthy," Wujcik suggests the substitute, "I [pause, swallow] am [another pause] unworthy."

To help get a campaign off the ground, the book supplies a brief scenario involving a scale-covered corpse and a 16-legged cat. What can the PCs do when they finish the scenario? Open the book and pick a page: they can petition the gods for the secret of immortality, learn how to transform their hearts into magical gems, or track down a murderous band of quicksilver monkeys.

Evaluation: Palladium loyalists will find that Mystic China fits in nicely with the Heroes Unlimited*, Beyond the Supernatural*, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* games. But that's just for starters. Because it's easy to filter out the system-specific information, Mystic China can be adapted to just about any fantasy game. You could, for instance, use it to resuscitate an old ORIENTALADVENTURES™ campaign or introduce a clan of *bian*-wielding gully dwarves into a DRAGONLANCE® scenario. Or you could just kick back and enjoy a good read. If you can resist a book with a section titled "Alchemy as a Cure for Death Worms," you have a lot more willpower than I do.

Pacific Rim Sourcebook

Cyberpunk* game supplement
160-page softcover book

R. Talsorian Games, Inc. \$14

Design: Chris Pasquarette, Paul

Duncanson, Far East

Amusement Research Co.,

Ltd., Nobuaki Takerube, Tateno

Tsuneo, Tano Akira, Hiyoji Miyako,

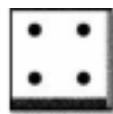
Yamamoto Tsuyoshi, Suzufuki Tarot,

Nakajima Sonomi, and Uruki Teruaki

Editing: Derek Quintanar and Chris
Pasquarette

Illustrations: Robert Chang, Mike Jackson,
and Ben Miller

Cover: Mike Ebert



If you're in the mood for a trip to the Orient, but *Mystic China* strikes you as too bizarre, I direct your attention to the *Pacific Rim Sourcebook*, which takes a more conventional approach to the same topic. Though it's intended for Cyberpunk, the user-friendly format makes it accessible to aficionados of other genres as well.

Sort of a tour guide for hoodlums, *Pacific Rim Sourcebook* focuses on the seamier sides of Japan, Australia, and 17 other countries of the Eastern Hemisphere. Each entry includes a timeline, a good map, and plenty of background notes, heavy on vigilante justice and cultural collapse. An assortment of styles keeps the text interesting; a lengthy interview with a Sungan zaibatsu bureaucrat introduces the Korea chapter, pull quotes from policemen and vagrants illustrate the

sleazier aspects of the Australian outback. Despite the plethora of authors, the book maintains a consistent, vaguely threatening tone throughout. Some of it, though, sounds like it was written by Martians: "In The Vicki business, a plethora of services exist 4 all, ahem, bends of life, N new ones R invented every day."

In the introduction, the designers confess the project got away from them:

"Because of the sheer size of the area involved, we weren't able to get as detailed as we'd have liked..." While that's true to an extent—the China section is a hit-or-miss collection of truncated essays; countries such as Singapore and Vietnam receive a mere two pages of description—they still managed to cram in a remarkable amount of information. The Cultural Similarity Table shows the relationships between 16 different societies (Laos is similar to Singapore but different from Myanmar). An excerpt from the fictitious *Pacrim Journal* explains the significance of Asian acronyms (CCP stands for Chinese Communist Party, CPC means Cambodian People's Congress—if you want to stay out of trouble, don't mix them up). A price chart compares the cost of water purification tablets in Thailand and Cambodia. The Japan chapter is especially good; it covers the dangerous "bridge people" of Tokyo, the sinister nature of *zaibatsu* politics, and the number of buttons on the tunics of gang members (5-10 buttons for big shots, 2-4 for rank-and-filers).

The chapters are peppered with helpful role-playing tips. Korean PCs are advised to develop a sarcastic sense of humor and pay attention to cues from the gods, especially as interpreted by religious practitioners called *mudang*. Japanese PCs are encouraged to invent their own slang, based on the sounds of words rather than their literal meaning; *bwa* might indicate an explosion, *ka-ching* might refer to an individual secured with handcuffs. Special rules cover all sorts of odd situations, such as driving on the wrong side of the road (a -2 penalty to Drive skill rolls) and the chance of being spat upon (in a city, roll 1d6). The inspired Life Path system uses die-rolls to randomly generate a PC's personal history. You begin with the Family Background Table, move on to the School Tragedy and Advanced Education Tables, and wind up with the Employment Table. It's a game in itself, and loads of fun; on my first try, I came up with an elementary school drop-out who became a corporate drone partial to jumpsuits and body piercing.

Ironically, serious Cyberpunk-ers are the players most likely to be disappointed with *Pacific Rim Sourcebook*. Opportunities to netrun are few, and there's not much in the way of high-tech gadgetry. The NPCs are little more than sets of numbers, flat and lifeless. Alas, there are no scenarios, either, just a few puny plot hooks.

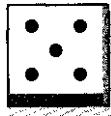
Evaluation: *Pacific Rim Sourcebook*

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presents a compelling, believable portrait of eastern cultures, devoid of the usual stereotypes. But by trying to cover +19 countries-about 14 too many-it's unfocused, too diffuse to be of much use by itself. Consider it a warehouse of ideas, through which role-players can rummage to spruce up their favorite games. Fantasy players might take a look at the *chambara*, Japanese swashbucklers who can turn into ghosts. Horror fans might consider adding Chinese Triad Gangs to a Call of Cthulhu* game. Me, I'm putting together an extraplanar culture that combines the grit of *Pacific Rim Sourcebook* with the whimsy of *Mystic China*. And I'm going to get there through a portal from the PLANESCAPE™ setting.

Tabloid!

AMAZING ENGINE®
game supplement
144-page softcover book, one
21" x 32" map sheet
TSR, Inc. \$30



Design: David "Zeb" Cook with
Karen Boomgarden, Anne
Brown, Jeff Grubb, and Roger Moore
Editing: Matt Forbeck
Illustrations: Newton H. Ewe11
Cover: Dawn Murin and Dana Knutson

So you don't care for the Orient. And transposing *Bug City* from Shadowrun to another game system sounds like too much work. Still, you're looking for something-or someone-to break the monotony of dungeon crawling.

How about Elvis?

Tabloid! imagines a world where the *National Enquirer* has displaced the *New York Times* as the newspaper of record, Bigfoot is a bigger celebrity than Michael Jordan, and Ross Perot really is an alien. In short, it's a world where every rumor, folk tale, and innuendo is absolutely true. How'd this happen? Who knows?

Designer Zeb Cook mumbles something about government conspiracies in the introduction. But in fact, he doesn't have a clue. And he couldn't care less. In *Tabloid!*, logic takes a back seat to anarchy. If Bart Simpson were a role-player, this would be his favorite game.

The casual, seemingly ad-libbed presentation accounts for much of the game's goofy appeal; it's as if Cook slipped this out the back door while the business office wasn't looking. The background material, for instance, is presented as a series of newspaper articles. Typical headlines: "Renowned Scientist Claims Atlanteans Made Crop Circles," "Shakespeare Was a Woman," and my favorite, "Knights of the Crap Table," which offers conclusive evidence linking the architects of Stonehenge to Las Vegas lounge acts. The economic system comes straight from the *Twilight Zone*. If a character has any money at the end of the month, it disappears—no explanation

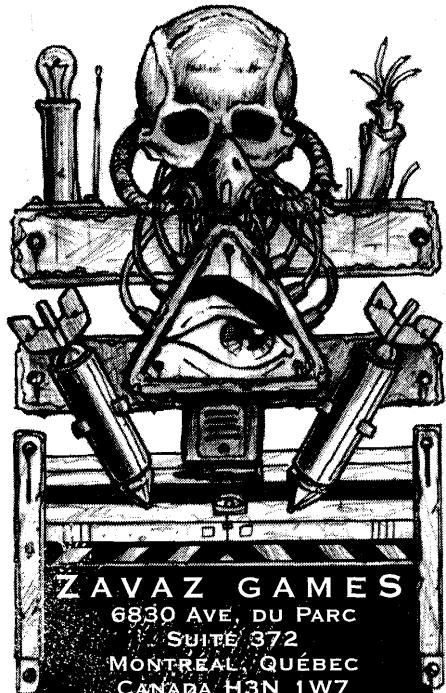
given. Equipment lists? "You don't need them," says Cook. "If you want to know how much something costs... go to the mall!" Looking for an unusual career? Keep looking. There's only one profession in the *Tabloid!* universe: reporter. Don't like it? Tough. "This is a game of serious investigative reporting... if you want to shoot things, go play another game..."

Under the direction of the Editor (the *Tabloid!* referee), PC reporters career like pinballs from one lunatic encounter to the next, searching for hot scoops. A UFO sighting at the Hollywood Bowl leads to a run-in with King Tut at the Grand Canyon. Adolph Hitler, now running a convenience store, reveals that dinosaurs are slumbering beneath the Supreme Court. The more outrageous the story, the bigger the payday. And the bigger the payday, the stronger the characters; *Tabloid!* cash doubles as experience points, which can be exchanged for improved attributes and new skills. The hilarious "Reporter's Beat" chapter shows how to slant articles for maximum profit. For example, instead of a headline like "HUD Reports Record Number of Homeless," the savvy journalist prefers "Homeless Nomads Terrorize Midwest, Led by Reincarnated Attila the Hun."

To keep the game moving at a frenetic pace, the Editor is advised to "dare to be stupid" by assaulting the party with a barrage of jokes and throwing the rule book out the window. For adventure springboards, he may consult the color poster of the world, which shows the location of the Flathead Lake Monster, Bleeding House of Doom, and Hitchhiking Midget Cannibal Alligator Men. If his party can't want to nail their first Pulitzer Prize, he can jump-start his campaign with one of two full-length scenarios; I recommend "Faux Pas," which divulges the identity of who's really buried in Grant's tomb.

Learning *Tabloid!* takes about as much effort as watching an episode of Beavis and Butt-head. In addition to the AMAZING ENGINE basics (summarized in the preface), the game requires just a handful of new mechanics, most of them dealing with character creation. Skill pools determine a character's talents (Dumpster Diving, Acupuncture), die-rolls determine his quirks (Caffeine Addict, Irritating Whiner). Combat results depend mainly on the whims of the Editor; there are only six attack modifiers, among them a -20 for "Hiding Behind Something" and a -30 for "Blinded By Flashbulb." Characters who die spectacular deaths may be eligible for elaborate obituaries, described in the Death-to-Copy Ratio Table.

Evaluation: *Tabloid!* is so light, it practically hovers off the table. Adventurous players, especially those who like to make up the rules as they go along, should have few problems with the anything-goes format. The absence of maps and statistics, however, may panic traditionalists. (Those who like the idea of *Tabloid!* but want



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more structure should check out the Pandemonium!* game by M.I.B. Productions, distributed by Atlas Games.) And like other farcical RPGs, such as the Toon* and Teenagers from Outer Space* games, *Tabloid!* lives or dies on the strength of the participants' comedic skills; the humor-impaired need not apply. It works best in small doses; I can't imagine anyone sustaining a long campaign. Then again, I'm stunned that Cook managed to get 144 pages out of this stuff in the first place. If things go sour in the game business, he can always get work with Geraldo Rivera.

Short and Sweet

City Sites, by Skip Williams with Michele Carter, Zeb Cook, Roger E. Moore, Jon Pickens, and Doug Stewart. TSR, Inc., \$13.

Do-it-yourselfers, rejoice! With *City Sites*, you can finally create the neighborhood of your dreams. The book provides blueprints, room descriptions, and statistics for more than a dozen businesses and buildings, ready to slip into any AD&D® campaign. Inventive adventure hooks and a set of fully-developed NPCs complement each entry. Though hack-'n-slashers may not find much to do—the buildings are relatively monster-free—sightseers will enjoy chatting with the wemic bouncer at Double Rose Tavern, and listening to the tunes of Dawnsinger, the humming fountain.

Nuclear War*, **Nuclear Escalation***, and **Nuclear Proliferation*** games, by Douglas Malewicki and Rick Loomis. Flying Buffalo Inc., \$20 each. Eight-card booster pack, \$2.

An unforeseen side-effect of the collectible card craze has been revived interest in old classics like 1982's *Illuminati** game. Let's hope Nuclear War reaps some of the rewards, as it's lost none of its charm in the three decades (!) since its inception. The players, representing major world powers, arm themselves with scud missiles and B-1 bombers, then launch atomic weapons to wipe their opponents off the face of the earth. Meltdown, Propaganda, and other special cards may be played to muck up an enemy's master plan. A successful strike results in the elimination of Population cards; a spin on the Wheel of Fate may reduce the loss by a couple of million citizens (they hide in bomb shelters) or incinerate an extra country (with fireballs or fallout). Nuclear War spawned two terrific sequels, either of which can be played alone; if you're on a budget, however, you can get along fine with just the original. The recent introduction of booster packs, featuring Disinformation and Virtual People cards, seems like a concession to players of the Magic: the Gathering* game. Though the boosters are fun to read, they don't add much to the proceedings; since everyone uses the same cards, for instance, you

can't customize your own deck. But if this is what it takes to snare a new audience, so be it.

Marco Volo Departure, Marco Volo Journey, and Marco Volo Arrival, by Anthony Pryor. TSR, Inc., \$7 each.

This is my kind of AD&D adventure: a seamless blend of role-playing, puzzle-solving, and monster-bashing, bursting with memorable characters and encounters. The plot centers on the exploits of Marcus Wands (also known as Marco Volo), an endearing NPC who's one part swashbuckling bard, one part troublemaking pest. After the PCs cross paths with Marcus in Waterdeep, he sweeps them away on a grand tour of the Realms. Fame and fortune await as do werebears, half-orcs, and rat-fiends. I suggest rounding up the entire trilogy before you get started. Though each volume can be played individually, the trilogy reads like it was conceived as one long adventure; it should be experienced as such. Once your players get hooked on Marcus, they'll be reluctant to let him go.

Denizens of Earthdawn, Volume One, by Louis J. Prosperi, Tom Dowd, Marc Gasgione, Shane Lacy Hensley, Sean R. Rhoades, Carl Sargent, and John Terra. **Denizens of Earthdawn, Volume Two**, by Diane Piron-Gelmen, Robert Cruz, Louis J. Prosperi, Robin D. Laws, Mike Mulvihill, Nigel Findley, Jim Nelson, and Mike Nielsen. FASA Corporation, \$18 each.

These books, beautifully written and illustrated, examine the eight major races of the Earthdawn* game in detail. And when I say detail, I mean meticulous, mind-boggling detail, the kind you expect from Ph.D. candidates working on their dissertations. The *t'skrang* section, for example, discusses *lahala* burial rituals, the cultural significance of tail slaps, and the body chemistry of lactating egg-tenders. The role-playing chapter explains how to simulate the four pillars of *t'skrang* Passion communion, and defines several *t'skrang*-specific talents (among them, Pilot Boat and Read River). In addition to the *t'skrang*, Volume One covers elves, humans, and windlings. Volume Two handles dwarfs, orks, obsidimen, and trolls. Which made me wonder—why didn't FASA just collect all eight races in one big book? Are there Earthdawn campaigns that have elves but no dwarves?

The Moonsea, by John Terra. TSR, Inc., \$13.

Considering the scope of the AD&D multiverse, it's no wonder that newcomers are often paralyzed with indecision—where do they go first? Here's an answer. Ace designer John Terra provides a city-by-city look at one of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign's most colorful regions, revealing the secrets of Sulasspryn (where giant spiders dwell in the ruins) and pointing out

the dangers of Zhentil Keep (watch out for the symbol of death). Handy sidebars summarize the key features of each location, such as the availability of ferry services and the best places to purchase supplies. Moonsea won't please everyone. Dungeon Masters may bemoan the lack of adventure hooks.

Purists may balk at some minor inconsistencies (the FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set refers to "The Bell in the Depths;" here, it's called "The Bell of the Depths"—hey, I said it was minor). But newcomers should find it an excellent introduction to a fascinating setting.

Dirty Secrets of the Black Hand, by Steven C. Brown. White Wolf Game Studio, \$18.

This supplement for the Vampire: the Masquerade* game catalogs the exploits of Gothic Punk's nastiest bloodsuckers. How nasty? They punish treasonous members by impaling them on stakes, followed by... well, let's just say it involves "heated instruments." The "You Are One of Us Now" chapter describes the Hand's bloody history; the background section lists several powerful new disciplines (like aura of decay and the self-explanatory consume the dead). Grisly and humorless, Black Hand is the role-playing equivalent of a splatter movie-hard-core players should take that as a recommendation.

Dixie* game, by Tom Dalglish. Columbia Games, \$9 per deck.

Lest you believe that collectible card industry has been taken over by wizards and starship commanders, here's Dixie, a simulation of the American Civil War. Wait! Come back! Yes, it's history, but it's fun history—I'm not kidding! Players struggle to occupy enemy territory through strategic deployment of general, infantry, and artillery cards. Simple but ingenious rules cover the effects of terrain and morale, along with sophisticated tactics like envelopment and enfilade. Expand your horizons—skip a pizza or forego your fifth screening of *Batman Forever* and invest the proceeds in a Dixie deck. General Grant would be proud. (Information: Columbia Games, POB 3457, Blaine, WA 98231.)

Ω

An eight-year freelancer, Rick Swan has written and edited for TSR, Inc., West End Games, and Steve Jackson Games. You can contact him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose an SASE if you'd like a reply.

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Wizards
OF THE COAST

Winter Fantasy™

Join the Hordes

by Scott Douglas

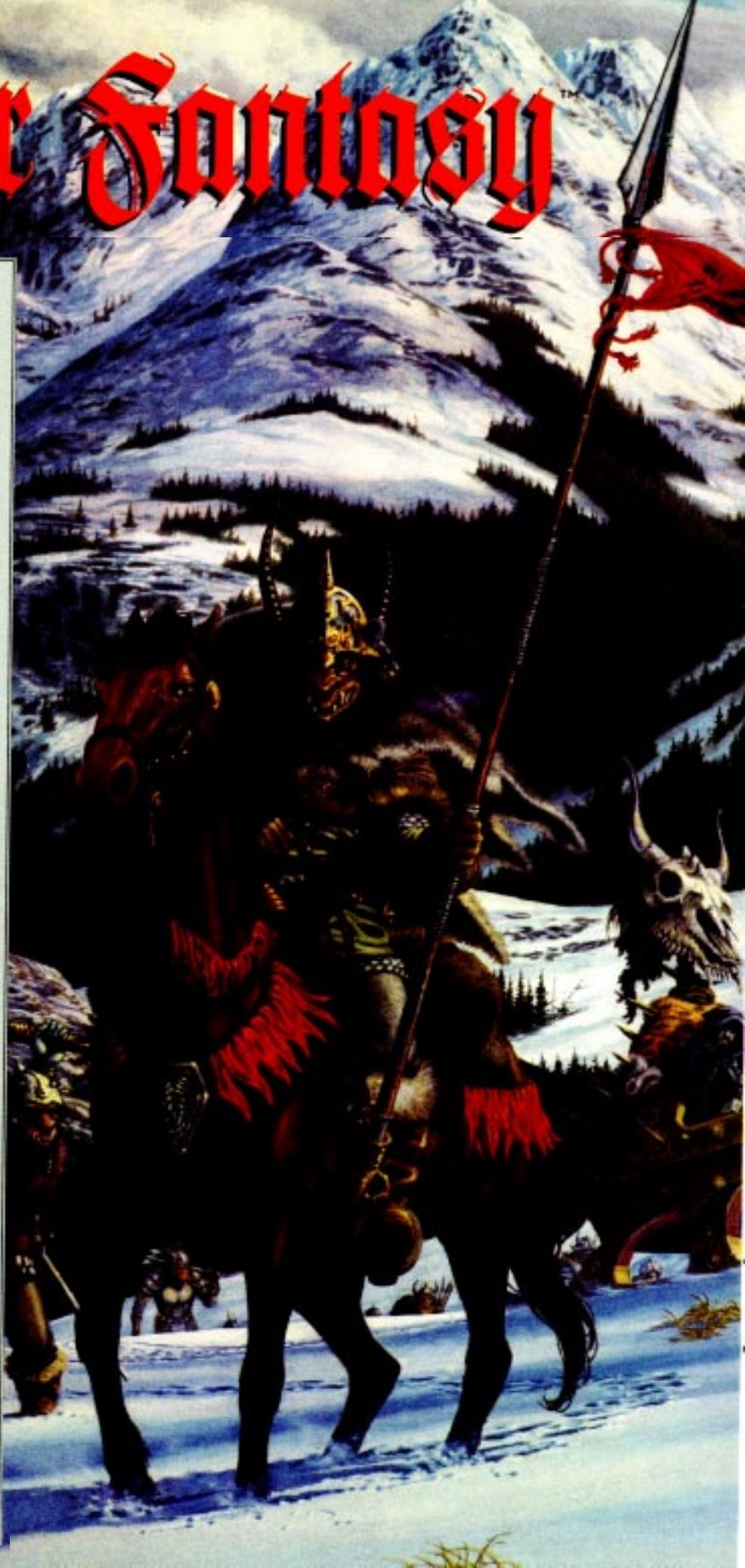
As a game master, I prefer conventions where I can run and play superb games, hobnob with prominent industry bigwigs, and walk out with a rucksack full of loot. Who wouldn't? But what I'd really like is to find a convention where I feel treated like a game master ought to be: like a king.

I found one.

The Winter Fantasy convention, one of the oldest role-playing conventions in the country, is the first and only game convention that focuses on the gamemaster. On February 9, 10, and 11? 1996, you can attend this innovative convention at the MECCA auditorium in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Jim Ward, Harold Johnson, Ed Stark, and many other designers and editors from almost a dozen game companies are expected to attend.

This convention has a fresh look and a new, original focus. Featured are World Builder Seminars, moderated by teams of TSR's product group leaders. These seminars help game masters hone their skills while gaining a deeper understanding of what the fantasy setting holds in 1996. Some of these seminars include:

- "Something Wicked..." with Harold Johnson, dissects the eerie nightmare realm of RAVENLOFT® to see what vile and horrible things lay inside.
- "Plane Crazy," with Andria Hayday, examines Sigil, the city of gates, and the extra-planar inhabitants which make the PLANESCAPE™ game so unearthly.



- "It's Good to Be King," with Karen Boomgarden, explores the dominion of Cerilia, home to the **BIRTHRIGHT™** campaign.
- "Blacker than Black," with Dori Hein, discusses the new **DARK SUN® Revised Edition**, psionics, and adventure in Athas.

Plus seminars on writing adventures, role-playing NPCs, campaign design, running combat systems, using the **PLAYER'S OPTION™** handbooks, and more!

Enthusiasts of Shadowrun*, Star Wars*, Underground*, Chill*, or other role-playing games will find World Builder Seminars for their favorite games. Representatives from game companies like FASA, West End, Mayfair, Wizards of the Coast, and many others will be here to display just what's in store for those game systems in the coming year.

As a bonus for participating in World Builder Seminars, attendees might just walk out with free products in their hands! Seating is limited, however, so participants must pick up their free tickets on-site; first-come, first-served.

In addition, Winter Fantasy offers an exclusive first look at TSR's new role-playing game, **DRAGONLANCE®: The Fifth Age**. Here's a chance to listen to designers Bill Connors and Sue Weinlein discuss this great new game, which won't be available until August '96!

Another Winter Fantasy exclusive is the first-ever **DRAGON DICE™** game tournament. Designer Lester Smith will be on hand to explain the best strategies for marching your Selumari and Vahga armies to victory.

And of course Winter Fantasy always delivers the best **RPGA®** Network tournaments of the year, like a new kind of

Network tournament: the **PLAYER'S OPTION** handbook "Battle Royal," or a Network Club challenge. Or a two-round elimination judges-only competition. And you don't have to be a Network member to play in most of these great events.

The convention also provides a great opportunity to experience the Network's exclusive "Living" campaigns. Living campaigns are shared-world games in which Network members develop characters and play them in special Network tournaments held at conventions around the world. The largest of these, the **LIVING CITY™**, is set in the **FORGOTTEN REALMS®** campaign setting, and is the globe's largest shared-world campaign with almost 4,000 players across America.

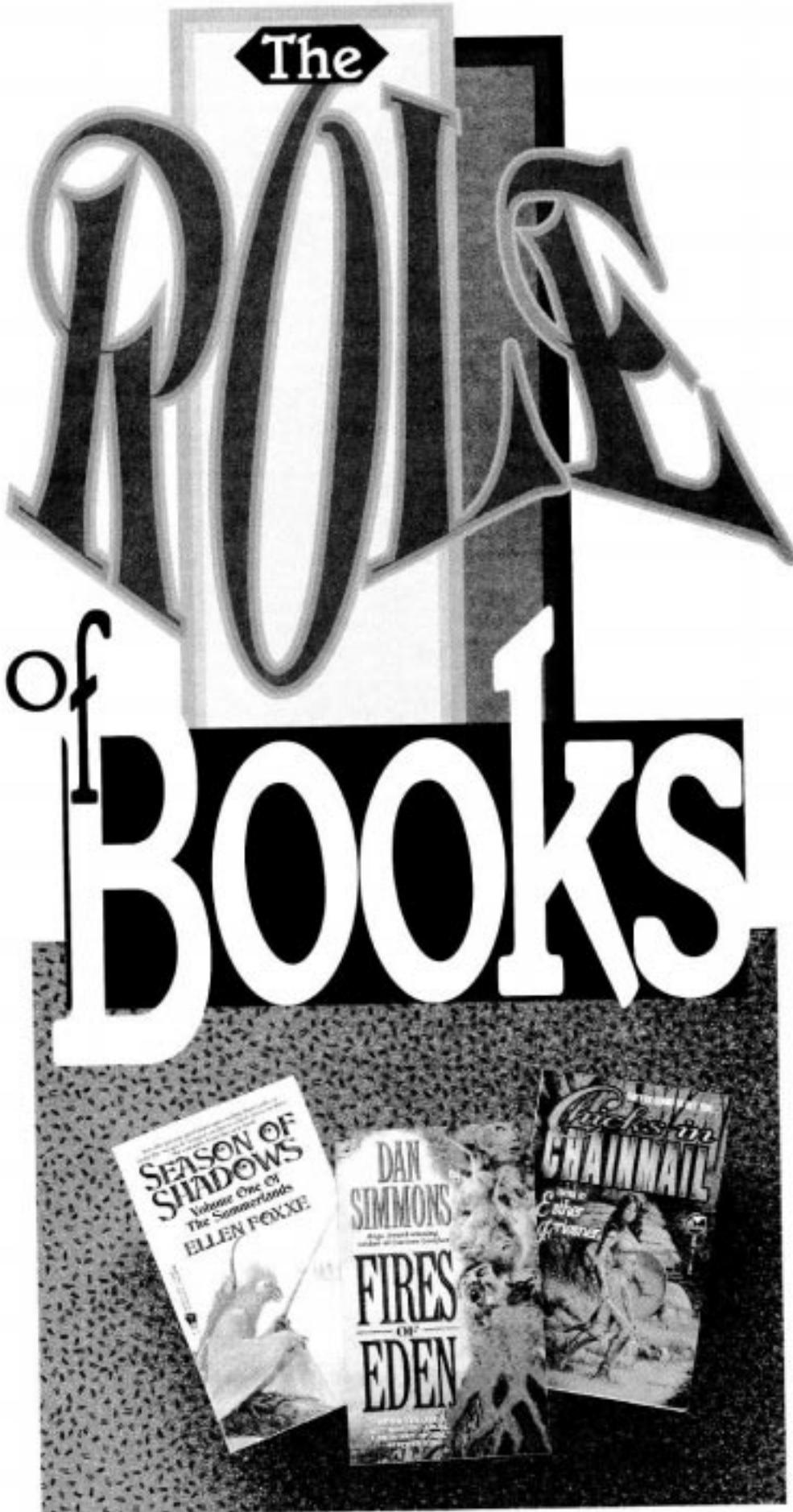
At Winter Fantasy, the Network proudly unveils the newest Living campaign: the **Living Death**. This gothic mys-

tery campaign is based on the popular **Masque of the Red Death** accessory to the **Ravenloft** fantasy setting.

What's all this going to cost? Airfare to Milwaukee is reasonable; contact American Express Travel Services, the

convention's official travel agency, for the best rates. The phone number is (800) 325-6157. Hotel accommodations are a moderate \$30 to \$70 a night. Convention registration is only \$30 at the door, and all events are free!

The 1996 Winter Fantasy convention is going to be a convention you won't want to miss. For more information, write to Winter Fantasy, c/o RPGA Network, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI, 53147, or e-mail at rpgahq@aol.com.



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Season of Shadows

Ellen Foxxe

DAW 0-88677-620-1

\$4.99

Shuffle the pages of a high adventure from Edgar Rice Burroughs into a well-mannered Regency fantasy yarn and you have some idea of what to expect from *Season of shadows*. Pseudo-nymous author Ellen Foxxe, however, has ably integrated elements of heroic fantasy and alternate history in a tale set several centuries forward from everyone else's medieval epics.

The political situation Foxxe describes parallels the tumultuous period of the English Civil War. In Albin, a Chamber of Statesmen controlled by the strict-minded Deprivant church has deposed the monarchy and now guards itself against threats from nearby Acquitania. Various dissidents have fled to the New World colony of Thornfeld: royalists, rogues, and the even stricter-minded Scrutinors. But this New World is stranger by far than our America; it's inhabited by a race of bird-folk (called the Yerren, who speak of even more dangerous flying creatures called shraik).

Foxxe's protagonist is Sir Andrew, formerly Lord Marshal of Albin and now leader of Thornfeld's military forces. As the story opens, he's defending Thornfeld from Yerren attacks, but soon must try to persuade a reluctant Council of Warders that the Yerren are prospective allies. Albin's Chamber of Statesmen, it seems, wants the resources of the New World for itself, and they are willing to share with neither their own colonists nor the Yerren. To complicate matters further, Andrew is also secretly harboring the last living royal heir, and there's an agent of the Chamber somewhere in Thornfeld who'd happily sell that information to her masters in Albin.

Though the plot is driven by the political intrigue, there's also space for plenty of wilderness action. This is where the Burroughs-like atmosphere comes in: there are exotic creatures, vividly drawn forests, hidden cities, mysterious ruins, and all the other trappings of an old-fashioned adventure. These, too, are developed smoothly, but Foxxe adds a dimension and balance to her Yerren-lore that's missing in the old Tarzan yarns, and skillfully ties it all into the larger narrative. Characterization is another strong point; in particular, the enigmatic Rolande Vendley is an engaging and multi-faceted adversary.

This is billed as first in a series, but *Season of shadows* stands reasonably well on its own merits. While there are clearly matters left for resolving in future volumes, the book reaches a distinct conclusion and leaves few threads dangling. Indeed, the major question left unanswered is how much of the credit Foxxe should get for developing the story's fascinating milieu, as the book is copy-

righted to packager Bill Fawcett & Associates, and there's no way to tell whether Foxxe invented the setting or had it handed to her. But while that's annoying from a critical and professional standpoint, it shouldn't stop readers from thoroughly enjoying the novel.

Chicks in Chainmail

Esther Friesner, ed.

Baen 0-671-87682-1 \$5.99

In her introduction, editor Esther Friesner describes this anthology as "Amazon comedy." It's an apt summary; for the most part, the stories in *Chicks in Chainmail* are light in tone and sharp in wit, and they focus chiefly on women who take their fighting seriously.

There are exceptions, of course, of which three in particular stand out. Susan Shwartz's "Exchange Program" is a wry piece which tosses Hillary Rodham Clinton into Valhalla among the Aesir and the Valkyrie, to the ultimate benefit of the latter. Mark Bourne's mild-mannered "On the Road of Silver" is a contemporary tale that turns its satiric eye toward rampant commercialism and ends, high silliness en route notwithstanding, on a uniquely gentle note. Elisabeth Waters weaves a convincing family yarn in which denizens of suburbia and faerie first clash, then co-exist.

The one that doesn't work is Jody Lynn Nye's "The Growling." The premise—magic released or heightened at what's politely known as "that time of the month"—is clever, but Nye badly overdoes the shtick of giving her characters Significant Names, and uses those names to spin her social comment off on a tangent that doesn't connect closely enough to the magical element.

Mercenary humor, however, is in ample supply. Elizabeth Moon and Janni Lee Simner each provide pungent insights on the problems of utility and economics in the women's armor market, while eluki bes shahar's "The New Britomart" is a stylish Regency tale that aptly illustrates the perils of taking history too literally.

Cyberspace-surfers will get a chuckle out of the latest adventure concerning George Alec Effinger's far-traveling "barbarian swordsperson," Maureen Birnbaum. Holly Lisle gives the Cinderella tale a cynically ironic updating, and Margaret Ball's "Career Day" gives new meaning to the term "cross-cultural."

Chicks in Chainmail is probably best not read in one fell swoop, and the majority of its humor is of a sort that may hold more appeal for female readers than for men. Not, mind, that the anthology is either preachy or Politically Correct; far from it. But its wit delights a bit too much in its wickedness to be entirely comfortable. Still, there's more than enough entertainment value in the book to warrant buying it. Almost enough, in fact, in the introduction alone (pay special attention to the

story about the two dogs).

Time Scout

Robert Asprin & Linda Evans

Baen 0-671-87698-8 \$5.99

The idea of professional time travelers, whether security agents or tourguides, is far from new. Indeed, the timescape of the present volume, first in a promised series, strongly resembles that of a young-adult series packaged a few years ago over Robert Silverberg's name. As a result, one doesn't measure "time agent" novels on the strength of their concepts. Rather, it's the skill of the execution that matters, and by that standard, *Time Scout* is definitely an above-average effort.

While the underpinnings of Robert Asprin's and Linda Evans' temporal theory aren't especially striking, they nonetheless indicate a welcome attention to detail. Theirs is a "time gate" system, with fixed portals that connect one time and place with another; spend a week in 1880s London, and a week of present time will have passed when you get back. The catch is that one can't exist in two places at the same time; "shadow" yourself and you're simply erased from existence.

Unfortunately, time gates, as a natural phenomenon, aren't entirely stable, and trained scouts are needed to establish what's on the other side of a newly formed portal. Becoming a time scout is teenaged Margo Smith's *idie fixe*. As it's also a supremely dangerous job, she seeks out legendary scout "Kit" Carson for training.

Kit, not unreasonably, turns her down flat before a startling revelation persuades him to change his mind, and recruits experienced time guide Malcolm Moore to assist. When Margo proves to be the world's most difficult student, matters promptly become more complex than any of the three expect, and that's more than enough to lead to near-disaster.

Asprin and Evans draw their characters well and lay out a solid, rigorous curriculum for the would-be scout. The balance of historical scenery to temporal logic to emotional pyrotechnics is even-handed, and there's a rough-and-ready quality that makes the narrative amiably accessible; it's less formal than, say, Poul Anderson's "Time Patrol" tales. Only one weak spot is noteworthy: Margo's motives for becoming a scout are convincingly described and unfolded with tantalizing care, but once the punchline has been sprung, the resolution follows too quickly and neatly, with too little long-term impact.

Time Scout's tone recalls more of Evans' previous *Sleipnir* than of any of Asprin's work since the *Thieves' World* stories of old, and it doesn't have the metaphysical edge of Evans' prior novel. And as a time-travel adventure, it highlights action and period detail rather than building its plot on clever temporal gimmicks. The storytelling, though, is as solid

as one would expect from this team of writers, and fans of either should find the book an acceptably brisk offering.

Fires of Eden

Dan Simmons

HarperPrism 0-06-105614-6\$ 5.99

Dan Simmons is usually hailed as a writer on the cutting edge of modern speculative fiction, but strip *Fires of Eden* of its exotic South Pacific trappings and sleek high-financial wheeling and dealing, and what you have is a remarkably compact, old-fashioned novel of classic mystery and supernatural suspense.

The scenario is the traditional "English country house" affair, wherein the players assemble at a luxurious dwelling in some sparsely populated, isolated locale. Once they've gathered, something happens to cut them off completely from outside help—and then it's time for disaster and sudden death to strike in earnest. Only when the hero and/or heroine unravels the puzzle do the barriers come down just in time for the authorities to step in and deal with the loose ends.

In this case, the locale is Hawaii's Kona Coast, where fast-living tycoon Byron Trumbo has built an exclusive world-class resort within smoking distance of two volcanoes: Mauna Loa and Kilauea. Now, though, he needs cash more than he needs real estate, and so he's negotiating to sell Mauna Pele to a Japanese magnate. Meanwhile, quiet college professor Eleanor Perry is visiting the resort on a personal odyssey, and brusque Cordie Stumpf has won a week's stay there in a sweepstakes. Add the three women in Byron's life and a handful of resort staffers, and it's time for both volcanoes to erupt at once, rendering Mauna Pele essentially inaccessible.

That done, it's time to shift modes, because what happens next isn't ordinary murder. No, Byron's problem is that his construction activities have accidentally opened a gate to the Hawaiian underworld, and a host of seriously nasty deities have gotten out. And unless someone can stop them, they'll destroy Pele, the more benign goddess of Hawaii's volcanoes. This will, in turn, loose the volcanoes to wreak unlimited destruction across the island.

Thus the story moves from country-house yarn to straight-ahead occult thriller, complete with a team of experts on various esoteric but appropriate subjects, a mysterious but crucial manuscript, a couple of ghastly deaths at the hands of the evil powers, and the obscure, incredibly dangerous ritual needed to bottle the evil entities back up and set matters right. Simmons ticks off the ingredients with the precision of a Swiss watchmaker, invoking each at just the right moments for proper effect and spinning out a parallel back-story at just the right pace. A bonus in this last is the neatly orches-



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You quickly learn there are "monsters" in the world, both human and supernatural, evil and good. The question is, which are you?

The **Nightspawn** are characters who discover that they are not entirely human. In fact, they are shape-changers who possess a comparatively frail, human "façade" and a supernatural, superhuman "morphus."

The morphus is said to reflect the character's personality or subconscious fears, desires and self-image. Thus some are exotic and beautiful, while others (most) are misshapen monsters. No two appear exactly alike and even the most hideous can have the spirit of a saint, while the handsome and beautiful may be evil incarnate.

The Nightspawn possess incredible magic and supernatural powers but must transform into monsters to use those powers. This power and their supernatural nature set them even farther apart from the human race.

Whether hideous or beautiful, cruel or kind, they are feared and slaughtered by *most* humans who see only a monster. Creatures of shadows, when slain, they disappear like the morning mist, as if they never existed (and leaving no evidence of their existence).

A surprising number of Nightspawn cherish and cling to their humanity. Many of these become secret protectors of humankind and champions of good. Yet even these misbegotten heroes must operate in secret lest fearful, evil or misguided humans torment or destroy them. But there are far greater horrors loosed in the world than this.

The Nightspawn see a much broader world. A world filled with danger, monsters and enemies, both human and supernatural. In addition to evil and self-serving humans, there are evil Nightspawn, Vampires and other dark forces all busy building their petty power structures, preying on the weak and innocent, or engaging in foul pursuits. Worse, they are hunted and slaughtered without just cause and without mercy by the *Nightlords* and their minions.

The *Nightlords* plan to quietly seize control of the world! They have already secretly infiltrated the highest levels of world government and business, and have begun to manipulate and enslave humankind.

Their only opposition: *humans* who have uncovered the truth, *vampires* (rivals for world domination), and the *Nightspawn* who have elected to fight their own kind to save the human race.

Feared and hunted by humans, the *Nightlords*, and the forces of evil, the **Nightspawn** are the ultimate anti-heroes who struggle to triumph against all odds!

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trated presence of Mark Twain in the historical sequences, caught up in a sequence of events more plausibly encountered in an Edgar Allan Poe narrative.

Traditional as it is, the novel still manages to spring a few ingenious twists and assume a crisp, thoroughly modern persona that allows it to masquerade as the sort of book read by people who actively avoid the SF and horror sections of their local bookstores. Simmons is also successful in the tricky task of conveying plenty of solidly researched folklore in reader-friendly fashion.

There's no shortage of verbiage already in print praising Dan Simmons' writing skills in one way or another, though it's amusing that the roundup of review-quotes on *Fires of Eden*'s flyleaf touts him as a highly accessible popular storyteller, whereas science fiction critics have tended to classify him as a more literary, thematically ambitious novelist. Neither is entirely wrong; in fact, Simmons has feet in both worlds. Gathers with a yen for exotic modern-day adventures could do far worse than to pick up this one.

Point of Hopes

**Melissa Scott and Lisa A. Barnett
Tor 0-312-85844-2 \$23.95**

Alexandre Dumas' brand of courtly adventure, Charles Dickens' dark-eyed accounts of the impoverished underclass, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's hand with intricate deduction; all these, plus a light dusting of alchemically flavored magic, are part of the background for *Point of Hopes*. Collaborators Melissa Scott and Lisa Barnett have created a world uniquely their own in which to tell a tale of murder, intrigue, and exceedingly subtle sorcery, but it's a world built on familiar-and very solid-foundations.

The novel's title refers to a district, or point, in the bustling trade city of Astreion; others are Point of Knives, Point of Hearts, Docks' Point, and so forth. Points are not only geographic areas, however; they're also units of a recently established law-enforcement system. As a pointsman, the man called Rathe is part investigator and part peacekeeper assigned to Point of Hopes, which refers both to the district and to the pointsmen's headquarters within it.

There is, as midsummer approaches, a deep mystery unfolding. Children are vanishing, in numbers and from places that suggest considerably more than the ordinary trickle of runaways and pranksters. Something very strange and sinister is afoot. Is it connected to an impending astrological phenomenon? To the suddenly odd behavior of a notorious trader in illicit but usually benign commodities? To the mild-mannered new fortune-casters in the marketplace, who are selling their services at astonishingly low fees? Perhaps to all of these, or none-but no matter

how Rathe tries, hard evidence in the case is nearly impossible to acquire. Only at nearly the last moment does the trail become clear, and by then it may be too late to stop a plot that proves more ambitious than even its architects have imagined.

Scott and Barnett are masters of understatement. They build the world in which Astreion lies with a wealth of small detail and oblique observation, rather than sketching broad strokes or relating sweeping history. The strategy isn't without risk; done wrong, it can leave readers with a confused, incomplete picture of what's going on, but this is subtlety done right, so that each new tidbit adds a bit of background to the overall design and fits, if sometimes unexpectedly, into the landscape the authors have created.

Not that you can skim blithely through *Point of Hopes* as if reading a comic book and hope to keep up with the intricacies of character and plot. Then again, one doesn't want to rush through this sort of book in the first place; like a fine wine or a finely developed campaign setting, Astreion and its inhabitants are a treasure worth savoring and returning to. It's been eight years since Scott's and Barnett's previous collaboration. Readers should hope their next doesn't take nearly as long to appear; but if it does, perhaps that's the price to be paid for this level of craftsmanship.

Recurring Roles

Followers of events in the Forgotten Realms have much to be pleased about of late. *Masquerades* (TSR, \$5.99) marks the return of the unusual swordswoman Alias and her companions, including Olive Ruskettle and Dragonbait. Jeff Grubb and Kate Novak make the event memorable, spinning a clever web of intrigue with a multi-layered, impressively staged climax (even after peeking at the end, I was still caught flatfooted by one feat of misdirection).

Meanwhile, Elaine Cunningham has been promoted to hardcover status, and *Daughter of the Draw* (TSR, \$16.99) finds her beginning a new saga rather than continuing her series about Danilo Thann and Arilyn Moonblade. This time, we meet the audacious young Liriel Baenre, whose natural mage-gifts and fiercely independent streak make her at best an uncomfortable fit in the lock-step society of Menzobarranzen. That Cunningham weaves a lively, entertaining tale out of this material is no surprise; that she manages to do so in a tone and style that complements R. A. Salvatore's existing cycle about Drizzt Do'Urdan without imitating it is remarkable. Elaine Cunningham is a first-rank storyteller, inside TSR's stable or out of it.

Elsewhere in the department of ongoing series, Ace is billing *Wild Blood* (Ace,

\$4.99) as the final volume in Anne Logston's extended series about the humans of Allamere and the elves of the deep woods not far away. Internal chronology, however, places the tale second in the sequence, and it's one of Logston's more thoughtful entries in the cycle. If it's truly the last of these books, it's a worthy if wistful closer, and it will be interesting to see what Logston does next.

Flag in Exile (Baen, \$5.99) is definitely not the last in David Weber's series of Honor Harrington novels, but the latest in this military space-opera series is as crisp as its predecessors. We're back, this time out, on the religiously conservative world of Grayson as Honor retreats from Manticoran politics only to find herself thrust into fleet command on a more direct front.

Back in the present day, *Indiana Jones and the Philosopher's Stone* (Bantam, \$4.99) brings the prose adventures of the world's favorite archaeologist back after a hiatus. Indy's new chronicler is Max McCoy, and McCoy's brisk tale of a bizarre Italian manuscript which may lead to the fabled secret at the core of alchemy is a welcome relief from the talkiness of Martin Caidin's last Jones outing. Happily, this series is back on the right track.

A pair of anthologies finish up the reading list. The first is a familiar name, but *Sword & Sorceress XII* (DAW, \$4.99) has a surprisingly Gothic cover treatment. Marion Zimmer Bradley's editorial sense, though, is still squarely on target. Standouts in this volume come from Stephanie Shaver and Vera Nazarian, with Syne Mitchell's closing entry among the slickest of any Bradley has chosen for that slot.

Much darker in tone, though not quite completely so, is Barbara Hambly's *Sisters of the Night* (Warner, \$12.99). This assembly of stories about female vampires is best taken in small doses, but has some powerful work in it. It's the sort of anthology in which readers' personal favorites are liable to vary wildly; from this corner, highlights include a stylish tale from Michael Kurland, whose work is too scarce these days, and a lighter suburban-vampire yarn concerning "Survival Skills" from Deborah Wheeler. Also notable is a lengthy excerpt from, of all things, an upcoming "Ringworld" novel by Larry Niven. Devotees of the undead won't want to miss this volume.

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Middle-earth™ The Wizards

"They first appeared in Middle-earth about the year 1000 of the Third Age, but for long they went about in simple guise, as it were of Men already old in years but hale in body, travellers and wanderers, gaining knowledge of Middle-earth and all that dwelt therein, but revealing to none their powers and purposes."

— "The Istari"

Unfinished Tales, p. 405



Middle-earth: The Wizards is ICE's simple, elegant, and intriguing card game for one to five players set in Tolkien's epic fantasy world. Players design their own unique decks and compete in a fierce struggle against the forces of Sauron, the Evil One. Each plays one of the five "Istari" (Wizards) sent by the Valar to right the Balance of Things in Middle-earth:

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- Radagast the Brown, servant of Yavanna, the Mistress of Growing Things;
- Alatar the Blue, servant of Oromë, the Hunter; and
- Pallando the Deep-blue Istar, servant of Mandos, the Lord of Doom.

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MIDDLE-EARTH: THE WIZARDS™

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USA, the exclusive worldwide license holder for adventure games based on J.R.R. Tolkien's
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by Cara Mundi.

Card Graphic by Derek Corbinman

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As reported by scout Relirva, drow, of House Teh'kinrellz, twenty-first house of Ched Nasad.

To Weapon Master Durdyn Teh'kinrellz:

I must report my findings on the two patrol members found dead from similar "accidents" last week. While this sort of thing is normal, particularly when rival Houses are involved, I believe the deaths were deliberate attacks from creatures of the Underdark. A few days before the accidents, I had discovered chitines near the Outerways. My patrol hunted down the half-dozen chitines and liquidated them.

After finding the two mangled bodies of the patrol members, I began to suspect that there may be more than a just a few wandering chitines about. After spending some time scouting the area, I came across a rather large tribe of chitines (some 55 in all) living not a day's travel from Ched Nasad. Invisibly, I spent several days watching the evil creatures. The resultant information I have gleaned for this report should impress even the Archmage Ildibane!

Obviously, we must dispose of these chitines. Might I suggest having Tlathar's patrol sent unawares into the area? Their group is weak and has our rival House's second boy amongst their members. My patrol can come in as a back-up, finish the fight, and claim the victory. Survivors from Tlathar's group, if any, can be absorbed into my own group.

I hope that the following report can be of use.

Relirva

Through my close observations I have discovered that the chitines can see in the dark as well as we.¹ Their multifaceted eyes range in color from black to light grey and sometimes green. During my brief stay, they slew a newborn because the creature had red eyes; it seems they feared that the thing was possessed by a drow spirit!

Despite our previous supposition, the chitine's mandibles are only used for grasping their food while they suck the fluids from it; they are not used for attacking. Females, in general, have smaller mandibles than the males even though the two genders are roughly the same size. Nearly all their meals are caught in the wilds of the Underdark, though I did spot a small herd of rothe (probably stolen from us) corralled in a rock enclosure.

The chitine seem to use their sense of feel as much as their excellent eyesight to catch their prey. It may be that they are capable of feeling vibrations through the cavern floor,² and that may be why, despite our stealth, we have had difficulty

THE ECCELOGY OF *The Chitine*

by Belinda G. Ashley

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

in successfully ambushing the creatures. I should note that levitation and flight nullify this advantage, as should be obvious by my successful mission.

I know you are familiar with the chitines' devious web traps and mazes, but I have discovered another mode of attack. I watched a patrol of chitines surround a group of goblins. Instead of killing them outright as is their wont, they wrestled the creatures to the ground, bound them, and took them to the temple to be offered to Lloth. I was quite surprised by their efficiency."

We know the chitines live, tribe-like, in houses of web. The village is designed in concentric circles with the central building a pitiful copy of our own temples to Lloth. Chitines living the farthest from the center are the lowest in rank, while those living closer to the temple are higher. They call the circle surrounding the temple "Wun Quarvalshareess ord'naen" (literally, "in Lloth's arms"). The individual households, unlike our own, are very unsophisticated. There is no Matron mother, and they even have males leading households. (Barbaric!) The members of the house may or may not even be related.⁴ I saw very few young and never saw them in any of the houses. Instead,

they were kept in a special section of the temple.⁵

The chitines have no organized trade so have few, if any, shops. I was surprised to find two in this village. There was an alchemist selling poisons and potions and a simple barter shop. During my brief visit, I witnessed a caravan of duergar come to trade weapons for a small chest of potions.⁶ The presence of the shops and the caravan lead me to believe that the chitines have been here for some time and may be stockpiling weapons for future conflict.

The chitines seem to spend much of their time in worship. Everyone goes to the temple twice a day at various times. When not engaged in worship, they usually go off on patrols.⁷ In my five days of observation, I noticed an increase in these patrols in the area of Ched Nasad.

This leads me to another unpleasant thought: the chitines may be responsible for more than just the two deaths last week. How many of us have they slain unawares? I'm curious to find out.

One of the most bizarre things I saw was a contest held in a pen outside the temple. In the pen was a huge spherical cage of webbing. Two contestants were given bone clubs, put into the sphere, and

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then the sphere was set into motion. The object of the contest was to be the only one standing (or should I say, conscious?) at the end of the competition. The winner was then recognized as the new head of a household. I was disappointed that the loser was allowed to live (the shame!), but he was shunned, and became literally, houseless. His few belongings were thrown out in the street and he wandered off towards the outer circle. Whether this is a permanent station or not wasn't clear to me.⁸

Our most pressing concern with this village, however, is the chitines' unusual priestesses, or *choldrith*, as they are called (see entry below). They are similar in build to the chitines, but with several differences. For one, they are completely hairless and their smooth skin is a dark, charcoal grey. They're also larger than chitines and have small, almost negligible, mandibles. Their silver-white eyes are not multifaceted like those of the others. They have incredibly long, pointed ears that resemble horns. A revolting sight I assure you!

I only saw three of these creatures and did not get the chance to watch them perform their rituals inside the temple so I can only guess at their limits of power. As far as I could tell, the choldrith were concerned only with the temple and did not interfere with other chitines except to run the contest. I also noted that the choldrith were never without their armor and weapons and were fiercely guarded over by several carrion crawlers. Through some magical means, the priestesses had control over the creatures and used the monsters to guard the temple as well as themselves. No doubt they could use the carrion crawlers to aid in defending the village.

I had to leave my observation to return to my regular duties. I stand ready to follow any orders you may have.

1. Chitines have 120" infravision.
2. Their hearing is only average, but they are very sensitive to ground vibrations. Because of this, they are taken unaware on a 1 on a surprise roll.
3. If a chitime is so inclined, he may forgo his weapon attacks and wrestle an opponent to the ground. Chitime, because of their extra arms, gain a +3 on their attack rolls.
4. In the hierarchy of the chitime, the strongest take the choicest houses and positions; the weakest are subjected to the lowest ranks and have to do the dirtiest work and are moved further from the center of the tribe. In this way, when under attack, the weakest near the outer ring are killed first. As intruders work towards the middle of the tribe, the chitines' defenses become progressively tougher.

All heads of households within the

Wun Quarvalsharess *ord'naen* are considered the same rank and form the council by which the tribal laws (such as they are) are made. Their goal, as a society, is to become Lloth's favorite children by destroying all drow and driders. Their lives are run in an orderly fashion: worship, patrol for food, kill their enemies, and create more chitine.

Chitine live in communal houses lead by the strongest individual, be it male or female. A typical house will have 2-7 members of mixed gender.

5. Because chitines were originally cast-off experiments of the drow, it is difficult for them to give birth and many infants are stillborn. Only 15% of a tribe will be offspring. Chitines give birth to one young every 25-35 years and keep no permanent mates.

Children are given to the Temple of Lloth at birth and raised independently of their parents. At the age of 30, the young are considered adults and leave the Temple to start a house of their own or join an existing household. This is the only time in their lives that they will not have to challenge the right to membership in a house. They may or may not return to a parent. Chitines live to be 100-150 years old.

6. Chitines seldom have visitors other than their own kind and seldom barter with non-chitine, preferring to kill, trick, or steal (in that order) to get what they want. However, occasionally they will trade trinkets, potions, and other odd items for weapons and food stuffs with those they deem either too powerful or difficult to kill.

7. Patrols consist of 3-6 chitines and one superior with an AC 4 (web armor as described in the FRMCI) and 3 Hit Dice (XP value: 120).

8. The Contest: Anyone can challenge any member or head of any household to gain a higher ranking. The contest is fought until one surrenders or is beaten to unconsciousness. (Priestesses heal all wounds at the end of the battle.) The winner can choose to take the loser's belongings if he so desires. Meanwhile, the loser must obey and work for anyone asking for his services. The loser, after six months, can work his way back into the system by challenging another member or head of a household.

CHITINE PRIESTESS, (CHOLDRITH)

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any subterranean
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Tribal
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Carnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (15-16)
TREASURE:	D (R, S)
ALIGNMENT:	Chaotic evil

NO. APPEARING:	1-5
ARMOR CLASS:	8 (4)
MOVEMENT:	12, Web 9
HIT DICE:	4+2
THAC0:	16
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 (1)
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-6/14, or 1-3 bite plus poison
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	45%
SIZE:	M (5' tall)
MORALE:	Champion (15-16)
XP Value:	450

Choldrith are a peculiarity among the chitine race. They are born to normal chitine parents and are always female. The birth of a choldrith is considered a great blessing from Lloth and the parents are given rank within the *Wun Quarvalsharess ord'naen*. One out of every 20 births is a choldrith and they live to be 150-250 years old. Choldrith are sterile so cannot bear young; instead, they raise all the young of the tribe under their strict care in the confines of the temple, twisting their minds to the glories of Lloth.

The choldrith's tough skin gives her a natural AC of 8. Their quickness and agility give them a -2 bonus to their AC (dexterity 16). Though they have the web-making ability, they seldom use this, preferring the tribe to provide their weapons, armor, and clothing. Choldrith are quite intelli-

gent and know several of the Underdark languages such as duergar, goblin, and orcish.

Whenever encountered, Choldrith will be wearing their webbed armor, spiked mace, and dagger. If prepared for battle, they will also carry a webbed shield and fight with both weapons and shield leaving one free hand for casting spells. Unlike the chitine, the choldrith can bite with their mandibles and inflict a poison. The bite causes 1-3 hp of damage and injects a paralytic poison that lasts 1-6 hours. Normal saving throws apply. They cannot attack with their weapons the same round as they bite or cast spells. Their daggers are often coated with poison, class A.

Choldrith have the casting ability of a 7th-level priestesses. They can use scrolls and magic items and have two innate abilities: *darkness 15' radius* and *bless*. Each can be used twice a day. Choldrith live for the glory of Lloth and spend their entire life teaching others how to properly worship their deity. They seldom concern themselves with the daily lives of commoners or anything outside worship, teaching, and the protection of the tribe. Their one outlet from the temple is the running of the Contest which they passionately adore.

Though not known to be forgiving, choldrith seldom take the lives of their own people (even if from another tribe)

because they are so few in numbers. On the rare occasion that they kill one of their own, they are usually doing so because of their beliefs (as is the case for red-eyed infants) or because an individual has committed some grave heretical transgression. Backstabbing is considered by the priestesses a crime against the people and is punishable by excommunication from the tribe.

Choldrith are fanatics, willing to take their lives for the glory of their goddess. They fervently believe that their people will overcome the drow and become Lloth's blessed children. Choldrith are enraged by the sight of drow and gain a +2 to their attack rolls.

Other than the above changes, choldrith follow the same outline as the chitine entry in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®*.

Priestesses can charm carrion crawlers with a special rod granted by Lloth. These rods are very rare as Lloth grants them to a priestess only once in the priestess' lifetime. The charm is cast at 12th-level and has a two-month duration. The rod has 20-30 charges, is non-rechargeable, and can only be used by priestesses of Lloth. Each charm uses one charge. Carrion crawlers get their saving throws at a -4 to their rolls. The charm is broken only if the priestess takes offensive action against the carrion crawler or if *dispel magic* is cast upon it.

Ω

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new and more terrible dangers
appear. But I see these as merely
the pangs of birth, for a new
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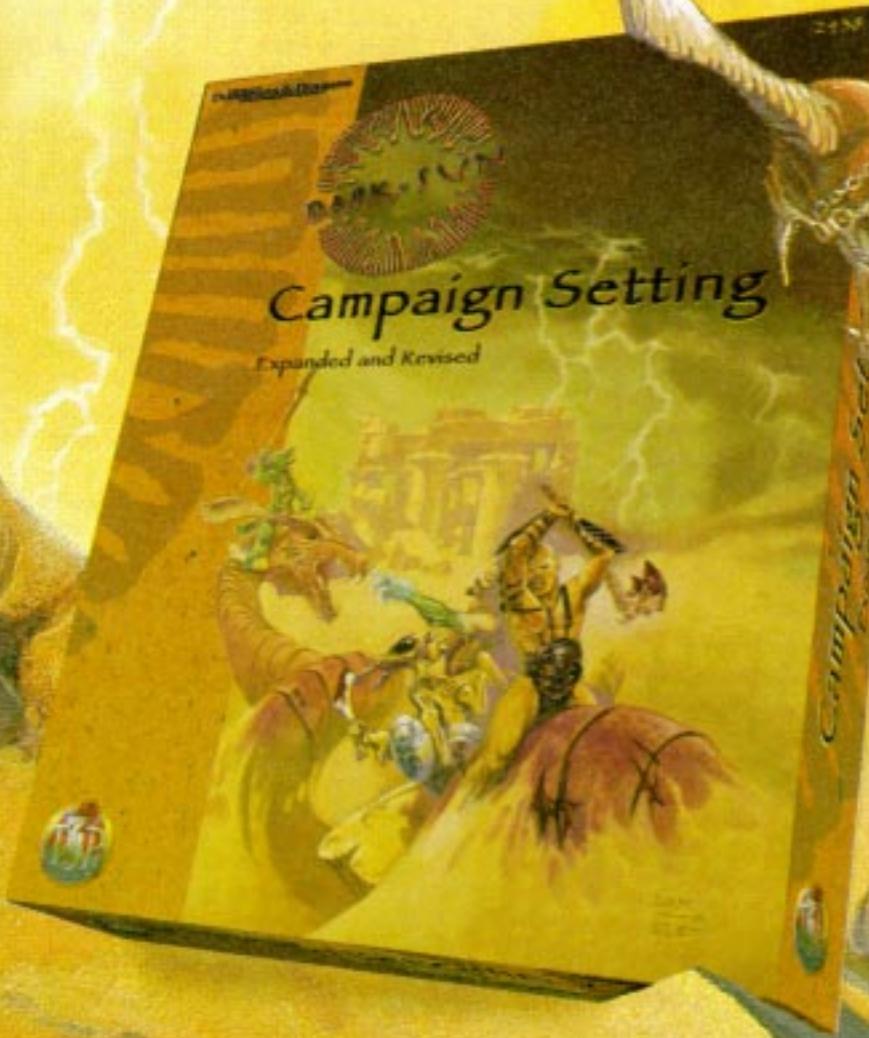
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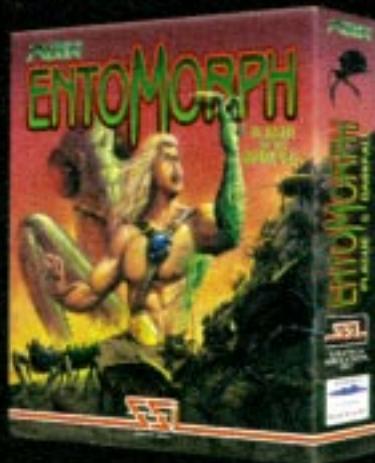


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Getting Opmotized

by David "Zeb" Cook

Okay, this column went in late. I admit it. I've been *opmotized*.

Opmotized? What's that you ask?

Opmotization is a special thing, reserved for those lucky folks who've got computers and aren't afraid to use them. It probably includes you, since you're reading this column. Opmotization is what happens when MIS' comes calling. "We're just here to make a few improvements on your system," they say through big bland smiles. "It's time to update that horribly outdated software you've been using. Why, the latest version has loads of new features to improve and optimize your machine's performance. You'll thank us. Really."

By the time they get done tinkering in the case, you've been opmotized. Now, your computer will (pick all that apply):

1. Do nothing (unless the MIS guy is watching)

2. Do something, but not what you remember it doing before.

3. Work perfectly — until it's too late whereupon it sells all your tiles to a pawnshop in Scranton and binges on with cheap wine on the proceeds.

See, I've just installed Windows 9.5 — for the third time. I've been *opmotized*.

By now you've heard everything there probably is to hear about Windows 95, from Bill Gates and the Rolling Stones to your Mac-worshipping roommate. You've heard how it's the replacement for sliced bread and the Holy Grail. You've heard how it's ol' devil DOS in disguise.

Windows 95, the new operating system, has been awaited for so long that its slightest hiccup or tremor has been amplified into the next Big One that will shatter the foundations of computing as we know it. You've especially heard how Windows 95 will make you more in touch, more godlike, and more productive. Productive? Feh! How does it do for games? The thing you probably haven't heard is how well can you play your favorite games with it. Well, the answer is — "Depends."

There's no denying that for games Windows 95 is better than Windows 3.1. Windows 95 is a lot better at handling things like video, digitized sound, memory requirements, DOS sessions, screen redraws, and god-knows-what else. But all those things aren't the key. Compatibility is what counts. In an ideal world, you want everything that worked before to work just the same, only better. Too bad it's not an ideal world, Windows 95 is pretty good, but it's just not compatible with all the DOS and Windows 3.1 things that came before. (And before any Mac



users get on their high horse, let me remind them of the glitches in changes from System 6.X to 7.X.)

The first issue is hardware compatibility. Windows 95 did a fine job of finding all the gadgets on my system-monitor, mouse, video board, printer, drives (mostly), even the video capture board. There was only one snag — my soundcard. It's an off-brand made by an outfit so small I don't even know if they're still alive, so Microsoft apparently didn't see a need to support the three that were sold in the U.S. As far as Windows 95 was concerned, my soundcard didn't exist. Fortunately, Windows 95 could use its defaults to play sounds through my card. The only problem was the same rule didn't apply to running games.

Because, you see, there just aren't any Windows 95 games out there yet (maybe there are by the time you read this, but not right now). There aren't that many Windows 3.1 games out there either. That means all the games you want to play were written for DOS and, according to Windows 95 doctrine, DOS is now dead. Windows 95 replaced not just Windows 3.1, but Windows and DOS. With a Windows 95 machine, there is no need to have DOS at all. Here's where it gets tricky though — Windows 95 can pretend it's DOS, so you can still run your DOS games.

And that leads to software compatibility. Windows 95 isn't DOS and DOS certainly isn't Windows 9.5, so no matter how well-meaning the two are, they don't always get along. Games can freeze at the wrong key-press and end themselves rather abruptly or they can run just fine without a glitch or a hitch. You just never know and the game manufacturers aren't much help at

this point. Sure they've been working with Windows 95 longer than you and have tried to make sure their game will work properly under it, but they can't guarantee it. When the Read Me file says, "This game should work just fine in Windows 95," they're guessing! They don't know all the strange things you've got in your machine (like my alien soundcard) or the 20 million ways you've already been opmotized.

They've tried it with the most common set-ups, but the best they can say right now is that it *should* run fine. Any more than that is just not telling you the truth.

So how does Windows 95 do in real life? Here are my highly informal results from testing several titles.

Doom: This was held up as an example of what Windows 95 could do — run Doom in a window with little or no loss of speed. What the heck, I gave it a try, and what do you know? It did. I scrolled through mazes smoothly right on my desktop. The only problem was that with my unknown soundcard, I got music but no sound effects — just static.

Virtual Pool: Although not up for review here, this game has a nice combination of 3-D, sound, music, and video. Like *Doom* I could play, but without sound. Trying to watch the movies caused the whole system to hang. Exiting Windows 95 to DOS mode (a choice you have on quitting) let me get the whole mix-sound, movies, and game.

Prisoner of Ice: The Read Me for this adventure game said it "should run without problem in Windows 95." Wrong—at least for me. Aside from the usual sound

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problem, the system choked shortly into the opening sequence. Exiting to DOS mode allowed the movies, but didn't solve the sound. In the end, the only solution was to line-by-line through startup, taking the machine back to its DOS roots.

Baler of the Evil Eye: When launched in Windows 95 this made pretty colors on the screen and then choked. Like *Virtual Pool* I was able to play it by exiting to DOS mode.

Has my experience been typical? I don't know. A lot of the blame falls on my hardware, certainly. You may have greater success or more problems than I. The thing is, there's just no way to know until you go out and get *opmotized*.

Fortunately, while I was battling the demons of opmotization, Ken was able to get some real reviewing done.

Discworld

Design: Perfect Ten Productions

Publisher: Psygnosis

675 Massachusetts Ave.

Cambridge, MA 02139

1-617-497-7794

E-mail: helpline@psygnosis.co.uk

Street price: approximately \$35 for CD version

Requirements: PC-compatible with 386 processor or higher, CD-ROM, 256-color VGA monitor, 4 megs, mouse, Soundblaster, Adlib, or 100% compatible.

My theory is that animated adventure games like Sam and Max, Day of the Tentacle, Full Throttle, King's Quests, and Kyrandias fill the fantasy-adventure market ecological niche of the low budget animated feature film. There're lots of folks who would gladly rent at least one animated fantasy adventure video every week, if only the film industry could afford to produce that many animated features at a price the consumer would pay. The animated adventure game is a perfect compromise. The art, characterizations, voice performances, and plots in adventure games can be as good as in an animated feature film; the animation is far less cinematic than you see in a Disney or anime feature, but it still works effectively for visual storytelling with the reduced expectations of the computer adventure gamer. Though the computer adventure gamer has to pay a lot more for an individual adventure title than he would pay for a rented video, the dollar-per-hour entertainment value is comparable (about a dollar an hour) since rented videos cost roughly a dollar per hour of run time, and a \$30 computer adventure game takes around 30 hours to complete.

"What's your point?" you ask.

If I'm right, the graphic and audio storytelling, and the escapist fantasy setting, are the most important elements in a comput-

er adventure game's success. And, by corollary, the actual game element is of secondary importance.

"So what?"

Humorous Adventure Game Features

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On one hand, *Discworld* is a nifty animated adventure featuring smart-mouthed characters on improbable epic quests in a smart parody of heroic fantasy universes.

On the other hand, *Discworld* is a sometimes clever, occasionally tedious computer inventory-puzzle game with sometimes sloppy, occasionally fatal game programming.

Between those two hands there's room to clap vigorously, pull out your wallets, and pay for *Discworld* - but not until you're sure you've got a version that runs.

World on A Disc, To Go

Discworld's fantasy setting, characters, and numerous incidents will be familiar to fans of Terry Pratchett's perfectly fine series of mock epic fantasy novels. If you've never read one, go buy one right now - *The Color of Magic*, *The Light Fantastic*, *Mort*, or *Small Gods* - and read it. In fact, I won't let you buy the computer game until you've bought and liked a *Discworld* novel, because the novels are far better and cheaper than the computer game.

The best feature of the *Discworld* computer game is Pratchett's *Discworld* setting, an affectionate and energetic parody of heroic fantasy fiction and FRP gaming. In the decadent stages of any genre, fine humorous parodies appear. The Western film produced *Hazing Saddles*; heroic fantasy produced *Discworld*. Actually, the *Discworld* novels are a couple notches above simple parody, since they touch lightly but with feeling on literary themes like the meaning of life, the ironic complexities of romance, and the mysteries of human politics and religion-all the while providing a good read and plenty of wry yoks.

The humor of *Discworld* is English humor. Eric Idle performs with distinction in the role of Rincewind, an incompetent wizard and the game's protagonist, while other British voices, including Tony Robinson (Baldrick of *Black Adder* fame) further contribute to the Pythonesque tone of the script. In weak patches, the script wheezes a bit with archaic *Monty Python* japes, but for the most part the style is an exceptional match to Pratchett's *Discworld*. The dialog goes on and on and one and on-often to splendid humorous effect, though at times to tragic tedium. However, you can aborting whole exchanges with the Escape key, and individual sentences with mouse clicks, so you can click right past the tiresome bits.

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The fantasy sets and animations are fine eye candy. Most of the action takes place in Ankh Morpork, a huge heroic fantasy city like Lankhmar, full of cheerful anachronisms and admirable sight gags. The backgrounds feature wide, smoothly scrolling screens, giving a sharp sense of size and place.

The inventory puzzle game is long and repetitive in the honored tradition of the computer fantasy adventure game. The individual puzzles are clever, original, humorous, and logical enough, and, in the long afternoon of this venerable genre, folks who measure their pleasure in dollar paid per hour played will get their money's worth. (It took me about 40 hours, even with hints and walk-throughs.) Other folks, like me, will find the 50th variation on the inventory puzzle game a chore rather than a joy.

Discworld's puzzles are entertaining and well-integrated into the story and setting, and up through the First Act, I was only vaguely conscious of passing time, but by the Second Act, when locations began to repeat, the puzzles seemed more silly and perverse than clever and engaging. Finishing the game was much less fun than starting it.

The narrative is on a grand scale, as befits the mock epic, with three full acts and a short finale. The setting gags were usually more fun than the puzzles; the gags were like play, while the puzzle solving was labor to keep the story moving.

The puzzle logic was at times doubtful and the clues perversely oblique, and I after a while I tired of wandering around from place to place on widget hunts bearing only a tenuous relationship to the plot.

Discworld's intolerable flaw is poor testing and quality control. The version I played suffered from countless sound errors, including entire dropped lines of dialog. A fatal and unavoidable crash in the middle of Act II stopped me dead in my tracks until I found an Update 1.04 patch on the nets. C'mon! If you bought a novel that fell apart in your hands halfway through the book, you'd scream bloody murder. There was no Read Me file, no e-mail help address, no Tech Support information in the box--just a phone number in tiny print on the game book inside cover. A quick look at any Lucas Arts or Sierra Online product would have shown Psygnosis the industry standard. Congratulations, Psygnosis! Whenever I see your logo on a computer game box in the future, I'll recall the frustration and lost hours of game fun associated with *Discworld's* buggy, fatal-crashing release and your quarter-hearted tech support.

Summary: Give *Discworld* an "A" for content and an "F" for mechanics. Great tongue-in-cheek script. Delightful parody of heroic fantasy and computer adventure games. Faithful, even inspired translation of Pratchett's world and comic voice into a computer game. Great voice perfor-

mances. Exceptional art and animation. Crappy testing, quality control, and tech support. The Bottom Line: Buy it and enjoy it--but only where you can return it if it crashes--or return it if Psygnosis doesn't send you the Update by mail with abject apologies for shoddy workmanship. The Mac version supposed to release in June had better be less buggy, or there's be peasants in the streets with torches.

Fun and Free

Free demos available on the nets.

Blood Bath demo (Macintosh): "It's time to take back the streets!" 'Nuff said. Click your crosshairs on the video bad guys and shoot them down before they shoot you. Bang! Bang! Bang!

Dark Forces demo (Macintosh): The dogs! Runs only on 040 machines or better. It's the *Star Wars* universe for a Doom-style first-person texture-mapped 3-D shooter. On a PowerMac it's way fun. Get your first adventure free.

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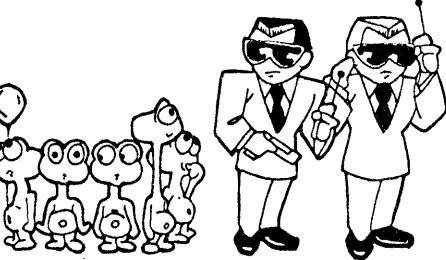
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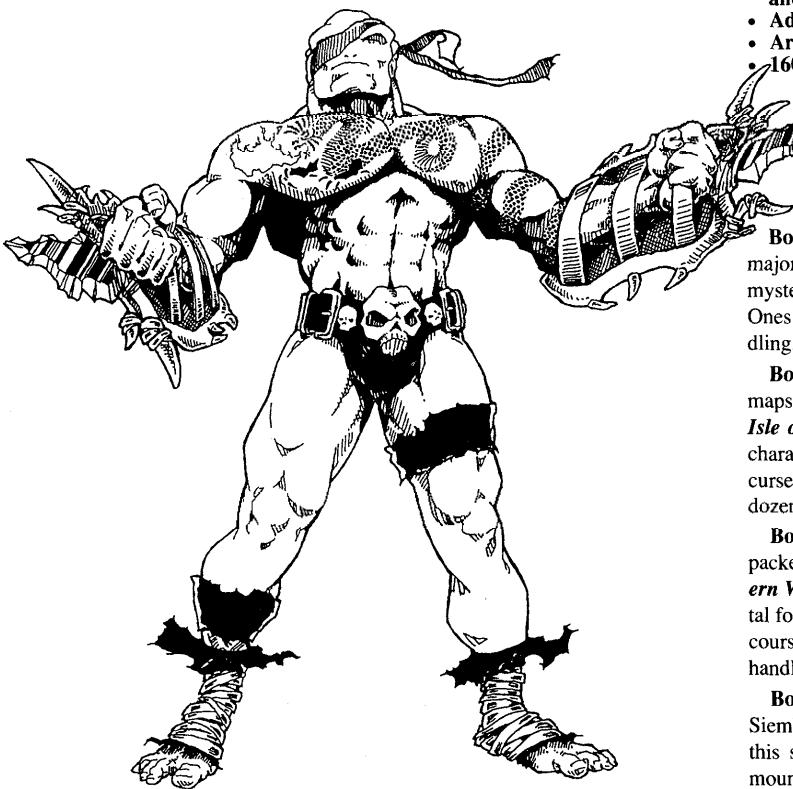
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Convention Calendar

Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing **must** include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, three months prior to the onsale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

Important: DRAGON® Magazine does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Publishing incorrect numbers is always possible and is a nuisance to both the caller and those receiving the misdirected call. Be certain that any address given is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice, we will return the card to show that your notice was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please avoid sending convention notices by fax, as this method has not proved to be reliable.

- ❖ indicates an Australian convention
- * indicates a Canadian convention
- ‡ indicates a European convention

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IMPENDING DOOM, Nov. 3-5

This convention will be held at the Queen Elizabeth Community Centre in St. Catherine's, Ontario, Canada. Events include playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, and tournaments. Registration: \$8/day or \$15/weekend (Canadian \$). Write to: Impending Doom, 222 The Esplanade, Suite 431, Toronto, Ontario M5A 4M8, Canada.

RUDICON 11, Nov. 3-5 NY

This convention will be held on the campus of the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. Guests include Mike Symanski and Dave Frank. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Write to: RUDICON 11, c/o Student Government, RIT, 1 Lomb Memorial Dr., Rochester NY 14623 or e-mail: rudicon@rit.edu.

SHAUNCON XI, Nov. 3-5 MO

This convention will be held at the Park Place Hotel in Kansas City, Mo. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show, dealers, tournaments, and the 1995 Midwest Region Feature Finals. Write to: SHAUNCON XI, P.O. Box 7457, Kansas City MO 64114 or e-mail: ShaunCon@aol.com.

GOLD CON, Nov. 4 NJ

This convention will be held at the American Legion Hall in Clark, N.J. Events include role-

playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments and RPGA® Network events. Registration: \$8 pre-registered, \$10 on site. Write to: A.U. Games, P.O. Box 493, Budd Lake NJ 07828

ROCK-CON XXIII, Nov. 4-5 IL

This convention will be held at the Rockford Lutheran High School in Rockford, Ill. Guests include Jim Ward and Tom Wham. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5. Write to: Rock-Con, 14225 Hansberry Rd., Rockton, IL 61072.

SALVO '95, Nov. 5

This convention will be held at the Highwoods Recreation and Sports Centre in Colchester, Essex, England. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Write to: Phil Kitching, 88, Braiswick, Colchester, Essex CO4 5AY, United Kingdom.

CON '95, Nov. 4 MI

This convention will be held at St. Stanislaus Catholic Church Hall in Ludington, Mich. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$5. Write to: Leon Gibbons, 13910 Olin Lks. Road, Sparta MI 49345.

CON 17, Nov. 10-12 VA

This convention will be held at the Sheraton Oceanfront Inn in Virginia Beach, Virg. Guests include Mark Poole and Larry Bond. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Write to: HaRoSFA, Box 9434, Hampton VA 23670 or e-mail either: schaffer@me.udel; michaela@pinn.net or on the World Wide Web: <http://www.pinn.net/~michaela/>.

PENTACON XI, Nov. 10-12 IN

This convention will be held at the Grand Wayne Center in Fort Wayne, Ind. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a flea market, and computer games. Write to: Steve & Linda Smith, 836 Himes St., Huntington, IN 46750.

CON ON THE RIVER II, Nov. 11-12 MN

This convention will be held in the Kryzsko Commons on the Winona State University campus in Winona, Minn. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$10/weekend, \$15 on site. Write to: CON ON THE RIVER, P.O. Box 751, Winona MN 55987.

DEFCON X, Nov. 17-19

NJ

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Hazlet, N.J. Events include role-playing card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$20 on site. Write to: DEFCON, 16 Grove Street, Somerset NJ 08873.

ELLIS CON VII, Nov. 18

CT

This convention will be held in the cafeteria of H.H. Ellis Tech School in Danielson, Conn. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Registration: \$5 on site. Write to: ELLIS CON, 613 Upper Maple St., Danielson CT 06239.

ADVENTURE FEST '95.2,

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This convention will be held at the Polish Falcons Hall in Depew, N.Y. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$3 plus event fees. Write to: Phil Simonds, 387 Niagara St., North Tonawanda NY 14120.

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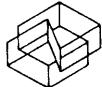
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This convention will be held at the Buckland Community Centre in Portsmouth, England. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, a painting contest, and a raffle. Write to: Lost Childhoods, 17 Kingscote Road, Cowplain, Waterlooville PO8 8QS, England.

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WARP'DCON V, Dec. 2

NJ

This convention will be held at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction and contests. Registration: \$5. Write to: WARP'DCON, c/o Richard DiTullio, P.O. Box 802, C.M. Box 1405, Madison NJ 07940, or e-mail: rditulli@daniel.drew.edu.

EVENT HORIZON '95,

Dec. 29-31

MD

This convention will be held at the Columbia Inn Hotel in Columbia Maryland. Guests include Hal Clement and Sandy Peterson. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, a blood drive, and a masquerade ball. Registration: \$25 preregistered. Write to: EVENT HORIZON '95, Attn. Registration, P.O. Box 1438, Sterling VA 20164.

NECRONCON 10, Jan. 5-7

OH

This convention will be held at the Harley Hotel in Columbus, Ohio. Special guest is Kailen Mitchell. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include demos, workshops, dealers, tournaments, a costume contest, and a con suite. Registration: \$12 preregistered, \$15 on site. Write to: Ravenstone Games, 6825 Flags Center Drive, Columbus OH 43229.

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The Key Word Is "Optional"

I am writing in response to John Holcomb's letter in issue #220. John bluntly said that he disapproved of the many new optional rules in the AD&D® 2nd Edition game, and claimed that he found the original D&D® game more fun. John's main problem seemed to be with many of the rules centered around optional campaigns (e.g.; RAVENLOFT®, DARK SUN®, DRAGONLANCE®, etc.) as well as several "new" rules such as non-weapon proficiencies, weapon proficiencies, secondary skills, weapons vs. armor types.. and his list went on.

Besides the fact that he was confused and angered about all these rules, he also has a gaming group who likes to get together and constantly argue about what campaign or module to play, and tiny obsolete problems (like the validity of Kinder in the FORGOTTEN REALMS®).

Sound like a problem to any other garners out there? It did to me. As a six-year gamer and a DM who has run a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign for three and a half straight years, I almost fell out of my chair reading the letter.

John, there are a lot of things you need to get straight if you truly want to enjoy the fine art of role-playing. First of all, obviously you are obsessed with many of the rules, but, John, I'll let you in on a little secret that like only 90 percent of the garners out there know: *the rules are not written in stone*.

If you don't like using non-weapon proficiencies, don't. Find a type of play that fits your group. Ignore as many or as few rules as you want. My group itself is not a "by the book" bunch. We laugh in the face of encumbrance (to a certain extent: you can't carry a million gold pieces on you at once), we snarl at morale check for monsters, and spit loudly on any psionicists or psionic powers happening to drift by.

You should do the same thing. Talk it out with your fellow garners. Find out which rules you think are no good and which ones get the thumbs-up. If worse comes to worst, vote on it. If worse comes to worst and even worser still, simply rely on good old-fashioned DM judgment.

As to your arguing for an hour and a half over what I deem "stupid things," per-

haps you and the rest of your "chums" were not cut out to role-play together. Find a new group if things don't work out.

As to your comparison of D&D and AD&D, I can answer that with little doubt AD&D kicks butt! I've played D&D and it lasted about a year before my friends and I craved more challenges. Most people started playing D&D and moved up, too.

To me, it's simply a matter of evolution; AD&D caters to players who wish to make things more realistic, more vivid, more in-depth, more all around three-dimensional. I'll admit that I had a blast with D&D, but it seemed like something was missing. Well, I found that something in AD&D.

You have a bad group, plain and simple. If a bunch of so-called friends can't stop arguing for an entire evening, how can you expect them to play on a regular basis, listening intently to the DM? You haven't given AD&D a fair chance. Play with a gaming group who will respect and approve of the way you like to play.

As for not being able to decide what campaign to play that night... um... er... *how about sticking with one for a while?* Playing a campaign with grizzled, high-level heroes over a three-year period is a lot more satisfying than running a group for one night and chucking them and running another the next night.

You said that D&D allowed you to develop your character more. Perhaps if you spent some time working and planning your character you'll enjoy it all the more. One of my players spends a good week in preparation just to make a first-level PC.

Adam Volk
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

I am writing in response to John Holcomb's letter in issue #220. John complained about how hard it was to roll up a character due to all the optional rules. Well, I hate to point out the obvious, but that's exactly what the rules are: *optional*. Nobody forces you to use a multitude of rules. They are printed for the benefit of those players who wish to expand the realism and freedom of play in the game. You say that a DM has to decide whether to use these options. Of course you do. That's part of the DM's job. If this upsets

your players, reach a compromise. Play with their rules this gaming session and your rules next.

You seem confused, as some players in your campaign are from DRAGONLANCE'S Krynn and some from DARK SUN's Athas. I won't tell you how to run your campaigns, but I personally find it easier to ask your players to roll up separate characters for each of the worlds you are interested in, and play separate campaigns for each. This makes it easier to determine what rules to use for each game, and limits confusion.

You could also allow the player who is interested in DRAGONLANCE to DM that game, and the DARK SUN enthusiast to DM that world, and so on. This way, everyone gets a chance to play, and nobody gets tired of just one world. If you cannot handle having characters from all worlds playing in one, *don't*. You are the DM; the final decision is yours, and your players have to respect that.

You say that often you and your gaming group cannot agree, and this often results in players walking out. It sounds to me as if you and your group have some serious communication problems, and if you cannot have a rational discussion, maybe you should find a more mature group of players.

When reading up on how to play DRAGONLANCE and the FORGOTTEN REALMS settings, you say you felt you wasted a whole evening learning the rules and had no adventure at all. You have to understand that you have to learn the rules if you want to play the game.

The worlds of TSR (DRAGONLANCE, FORGOTTEN REALMS, DARK SUN, etc.) are not compulsory. They are optional. If you don't want to play them, no one will make you: but don't say "TSR is moving in the wrong direction," because there are thousands of players out there enjoying BIRTHRIGHT™ and PLANESCAPE™. TSR role-playing is a no-lose situation. All games, old and new, are available for your enjoyment, and you will always be able to find people who enjoy the same ones as you.

James Fahy
9 Norman St.
Middleton, Manchester
M24 2JP England

I'm writing to discuss undead level-draining and its effects on a campaign. This particular problem has been a serious one for me in my own campaigns for many years, and I tried many of the suggestions of other readers in the past concerning this matter. Despite all my efforts, it seemed that I was doomed to push aside some of my favorite monsters in the game. This all changed a year ago when I stumbled upon an idea that has allowed me to bring back wraiths, wights, and vampires to haunt my players once again.

My approach is simple but both effective and logical. In my games, I have replaced the undead level-draining power with a system that causes the victim to be temporarily drained of one point from all the physical abilities (Strength, Dexterity and Constitution) per level that the original undead monster drained. For example, a wight that struck a blow would cause normal damage *plus* drain one point from each of the victim's Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution. The victim can regain his physical powers very slowly; just one point per day. Which statistic gets the point is randomly determined.

At first glance, this may not seem as formidable as draining a level, but because the rate of recovery is so slow, players will quickly learn to dread the ability checks that their characters must make. Many adventurers come to depend greatly on these bonus Hit Points, Armor Class, and other combat modifiers. After several blows from a small group of wights, an adventurer may find himself receiving penalties instead of bonuses and to some players there is no greater horror.

Another problem that this system resolves is that the average peasant can now survive a late-night visit from a vampire. Were one to stick to the level-draining abilities currently in the rules, a simple brush by a vampire will kill almost everyone in an average village. Thus it is difficult to recreate situations like Dracula preying on Lucy night after night. My ability-draining system solves this and even accounts for why a victim may appear to be afflicted by some debilitating disease. Generally, I enforce a coma upon those whose abilities-any one of them-falls below 3. Those in a coma must make a system shock check at their original Constitution's percentage or else the abilities continue to drain at a rate of 1 point a day until the victim dies because a score drops to zero. Note that in this case, the loss occurs even if the undead creature does not continue its attacks.

W. Jason Peck
San Jose, CA

I just got around to reading the Forum in issue #216, and I feel compelled to respond to Steve Shawler's letter condemning TSR adventure modules. Mr. Shawler complains that TSR adventures

such as the Marco Volo series railroad the PCs along a predetermined path without allowing them any control over their own destinies. He blames this on the storytelling style of play.

While I wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Shawler's stand against railroading adventures, I strongly disagree that the storytelling style of play is to blame. Without re-opening the "storytelling vs. dungeon-crawling" can of worms, I must point out that it is just as easy to railroad the PCs through a dungeon crawl as a storytelling adventure. All the DM need do in a dungeon crawl is force the PCs into a dungeon, block off the exit, and make the tunnels lead wherever he wants them to go.

Having defended the storytelling style, I must admit that the Marco Volo series is guilty of railroading the characters; however, there are several fine storytelling modules out there that don't do so. *Feast of Goblyns* for the RAVENLOFT setting is a first-rate example. The fact is, dungeon-crawling modules are more often the ones that are guilty of railroading. The blame for this lies with the designers and editors, not whether the adventure is a dungeon crawl.

It is clear that Mr. Shawler prefers dungeon-crawling to storytelling and I respect his right to play the game however he likes; however, I take issue with his attempt to get TSR to stop publishing storytelling adventures and articles. TSR publishes a wide variety of modules to suit both dungeon-crawlers and storytellers. Likewise, DRAGON Magazine goes out of its way to print articles for both kinds of players. I wish more players would learn to respect other people's right to play whatever style they wish.

Michael C. DeRosenroll
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada

I've been playing AD&D for about 15 years (playing and DMing). I'm an attractive, 27-year-old female who plays every week and highly enjoys playing and DMing. I'm currently involved in two different weekly games. In one I play an elven mage, and in the other I DM my own original world. In both groups though, I am the only female, and in my 15 years of gaming, I have only encountered four other female players. This spans two countries, three states, and over 20 different cities. My point is: where have all the women gone?

Some-not all-male gamers use role-playing to "seduce" female gamers through their characters. Example: female player to male player: "For the bazillionth time, my elf doesn't want to have sex with your dwarf!" This usually causes most women gamers to quit out of disgust, thinking all male gamers are like that.

The stereotypes that all gamers are dweebs, nerds, unattractive geeks with high-rise polyester slacks, taped glasses, and no social lives is false. The looks I get from experienced male gamers upon meeting me are of awe and surprise.

When they learn I am a DM, their jaws drop-and this is from experienced gamers.

There are not enough female classes, kits, or appeal. Forget DRAGONLANCE'S Kitara or Laurana; they were powerful, but paled next to the male characters. Example: female player to DM: "What? I can't have an 18/00 strength? And I can't be a paladin *either*?"

Some-again, not all-male role-players view female NPCs and PCs (regardless of higher ability scores) as wenches or brainless harlots who should submit to their every whim. Example: male player to room: "Are there any chicks here with a Charisma of 15 or above? Oh, yeah? I walk up to her and say, 'Hey, baby.'"

While I am not an ultra-feminist, nor do I preach what is politically correct, these scenarios are all too familiar to me, and have happened countless times. I'm getting lonely out here in gaming land. I realize that not all male role-players are like this, but the few bad seeds have chased away potential women role-players. I know there are more women out there, but they are few and far between.

Karrie Huff
100 Auburn Way S. #A-6
Auburn, WA 98002
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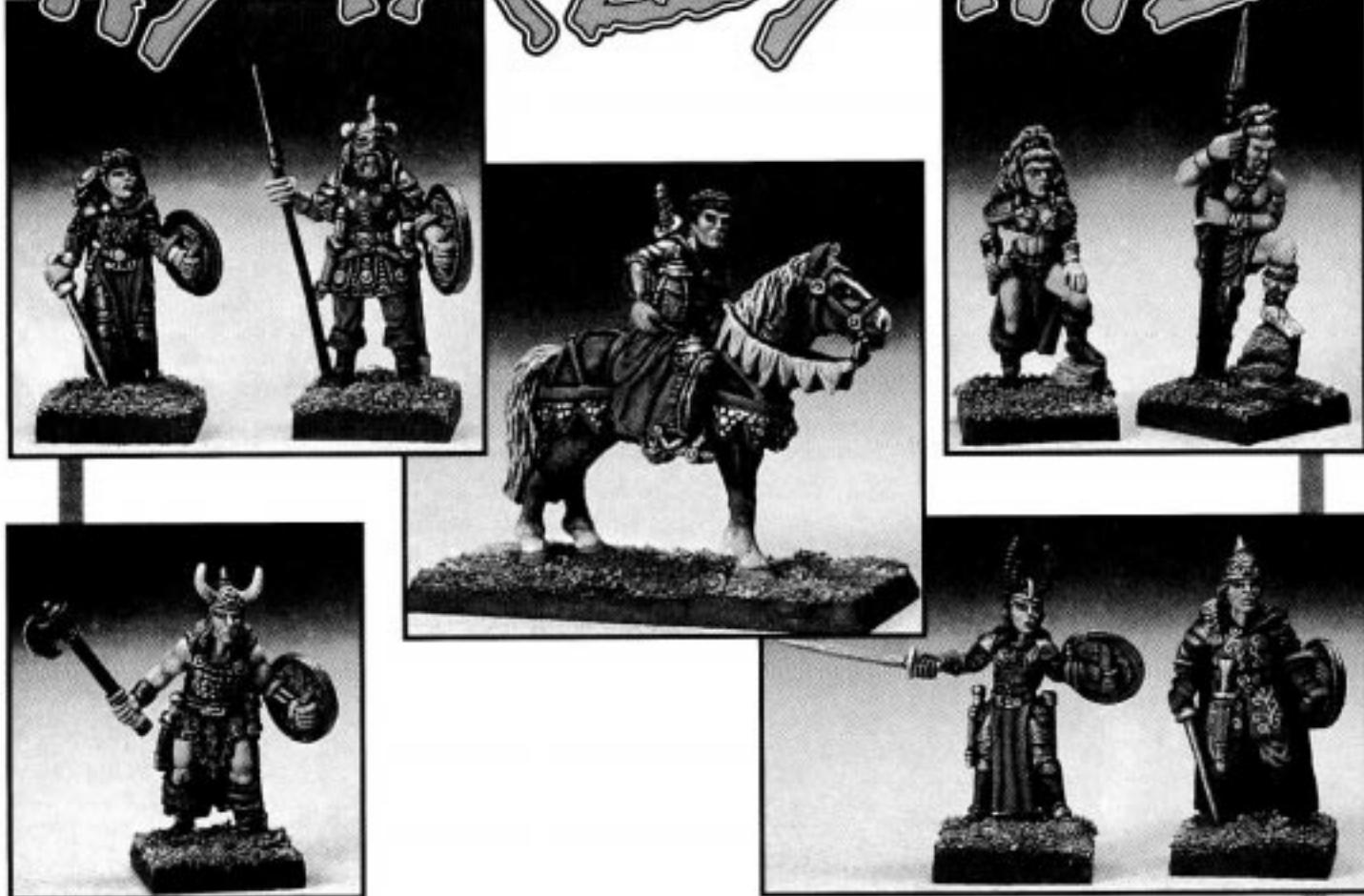
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RAL PARTHA

Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

Join the sage in a look at the new *Player's Option™: Skills and Powers* book, unless otherwise noted, page and table references are for the *Skills and Powers* book (*S&P*). The sage also examines a few other issues straight from the mailbag.

I have noticed that in almost every AD&D® book, the infravision ranges for the various races are different, the Skills & Powers book seems to be no exception. What are the correct ranges?

Here are infravision ranges for all the major races (and their subraces) presented in the *Skills & Powers* book. The *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome and its predecessors served as the primary sources for the numbers.

Dwarves (60'): Deep 90'; Gray 120'; Hill 60'; Mountain 60'.

Elves (60'): Aquatic 120'; Dark 120'; Gray 60'; High 60'; Sylvan 60'.

Gnomes (60'): Deep 120'; Forest Nil; Rock 60'.

Halflings (30'): Hairfoot Nil; Stout 60'; Tallfellow Nil.

Half-elves (60')

Half Orcs (60')

Half Ogres (60')

Humans (Nil)

The number in parentheses after the main race name is the infravision range for characters who purchase infravision from the race's ability list.

Traditionally, dark elves who live on the surface are not allowed to keep their innate spellcasting abilities or their superior magic resistance. In the Skills & Powers book it seems that they are allowed to keep their innate magic, but not their superior magic resistance. Is this correct?

Yes it is. If the campaign is using the *Skills & Powers* rules, drow (dark elves) get the abilities listed on page 28 and explained on pages 29-30.

When a paladin spends character points on the priest spells ability, he is supposed to get spells beginning at 4th level. The spell progression chart, however shows that a paladin begins getting spells at 5th level. Which is correct? If a paladin does not purchase the priest spells ability, does the

character still get spells at 9th level?

Table 20 (page 49), which gives paladins their first spells at 5th level, is incorrect. It should read as follows:

Paladin Level	Casting Level	Spell Level			
		1	2	3	4
4	1	1	—	—	—
5	1	1	—	—	—
6	2	2	—	—	—
7	2	2	1	—	—
8	3	2	1	—	—
9	4	2	2	—	—
10	4	2	2	—	1
11	4	2	2	2	—
12	5	3	2	2	—
13	5	3	2	2	—
14	6	3	2	2	1
15	7	3	3	2	1
16	8	3	3	3	1
17	9*	3	3	3	1
18	9*	3	3	3	2
19	9*	3	3	3	3
20	9*	4	3	3	3

Paladins who do not purchase the priest spells ability still get spells starting at 9th level (see *PHB* table 17), but fewer than those who purchase the priest spell ability.

On Table 46: Traits, shouldn't the Initial Rating column read Character Point Cost?

Yes it should. If a trait has a base score it is listed in the trait description.

The weapons table indicates that light and heavy crossbow quarrels inflict considerably more damage than they used to. Is that correct?

Yes it is, but the increased damage is only half the story. The *Combat & Tactics* books give crossbows a special ability to penetrate armor as well.

How does one determine a monster's Mental Armor Class (for the new psionics system)?

Here's something to tide you over until something better comes along: Assume that the creature's Wisdom score is about equal to its Intelligence score. To determine the creature's scores, look up the monster's entry in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome or the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM®* tome and note its general intelligence rating. A parenthetical note right next to the rating tells you a range of mental ability scores. For example, a ki-rin has

an intelligence rating of supra-genius, giving in a rating of 19-20 in both Wisdom and Intelligence. You can roll 1d6 to determine the exact score (1-3= 19, 4-6=20). Once you have the scores, calculate its MAC using table 74 (*S&P*, page 144) just like you would for a character. If a particular ki-rin has a Wisdom of 19 and an Intelligence of 20, its MAC would be 3. If you want a wider range of scores for the creature, you'll find tables for generating creature's ability scores in Chapter 2 of the *DUNGEON MASTER™ Option: High-Level Campaigns* book, pages 58-61. Creatures with racial psionic abilities, such as su-monsters and mind flayers, should get an additional bonus of +1 to +3.

The weapon specialization rule in the *Combat & Tactics* book says characters can specialize in only one weapon at a time. What happens to characters who must specialize in multiple weapons; for example, the samurai and the swashbuckler?

They have to give up their extra weapons of specialization, although the DM could allow them to have expertise in the extra weapons.

How do you decide if a grenade-like missile strikes its target? I've looked in both the *PHB* and the *DMG* and I could find nothing that says what attack number a grenade-like missile uses.

A grenade-like missile's actual attack number varies according to the circumstances. If a creature is not the target and the character is within short range (10' for a flask of oil or other lightweight object) of the target point, a hit should be automatic. For example, if a character wants to smash a flask of oil at the top of a staircase the party has just ascended, the flask should land where the character wants it to as long as the target point is within 10' of the character. If the character is rushed, or the target point is farther way than 10', treat the target point as Armor Class 10 and apply the appropriate range modifier. (In the core rules, a thrown oil flask has a medium range of 20' and a long range of 30'.)

If the grenade-like missile target is a creature, the attack number depends on what the missile is. If the missile is something like a boulder or a container holding a fairly small amount of liquid that has to make direct contact with the target creature to have any effect (such as a vial of acid or holy water), then just use the creature's armor class and resolve the grenade toss as you would any other missile attack (except that you would roll for scatter if the attack misses).

If the grenade-like missile holds a fairly hefty amount of material, such as a flask of oil, I suggest rolling an attack vs. armor class 7, adjusted for the target's Dexterity score and movement rate; I suggest +3

for stationary targets, -3 for targets moving a rate faster than 3 but slower than 12, and -6 for targets moving at a rate of 12 or greater. Normal range adjustments apply in any case.

What are the character point costs and base scores for the fighting proficiencies presented in the *Combat & Tactics* book and the psionic proficiencies presented in Chapter 9 of the *Skills & Powers* book?

Here are the numbers for use with the *Skills & Powers* rules:

Special Talents (C&T, pages 78-80)

Skill	CP	Initial	Relevant	Cost	Rating	Ability
Alertness ^{T1}	6	—	—			
Ambidexterity ^T	4	—	—			
Ambush	4	5	Int./Rea.			
Camouflage	4	5	Int./Lea.			
Dirty Fighting	3	5	Int/Lea.			
Endurance ²	2	3	—			
Fine Balance ^T	5	7	Dex./Agi.			
Iron Will ^T	6	3	Wis.Wil.			
Leadership	3	5	Cha./Lea.			
Quickness ^{T3}	6	3	Dex./Aim			
Steady Hand ^T	5	—	—			
Trouble Sense	4	3	Wis./Int.			

Martial Arts Talents ⁴ (C&T, page 98)

Skill	CP	Initial	Relevant	Cost	Rating	Ability
Backward Kick	3	—	—			
Crushing Blow	3	—	—			
Flying Kick	3	5	Str./Muc.			
Instant Stand	3	7	Dex./Aim			
Missile Deflection	3	—	—			

Psionic Proficiencies (S&P, page 1.55)

Skill	CP	Initial	Relevant	Cost	Rating	Ability
Contact	3	—	Wis./Wil.			
Mental Armor	3	—	Wis./Wil.			
Gem Cutting	3	6	Dex./Aim			
Harness						
Subconscious	3	6	Wis./Wil.			
Meditative Focus	3	6	Wis./Int.			
Musical						
Instrument	2	4	Cha./Lea.			
Reading/Writing	2	8	Int./Kno.			
Rejuvenation	3	6	Wis./Int.			
Religion	2	6	Wis./Int.			

T. Under the *Skills & Powers* character creation system, this skill must be selected as a trait.

1. This is the value for the alertness trait as described in the *Skills & Powers* book. The version described in the *Combat & Tactics* book is slightly weaker. The C&T version has a character point cost of 4 and a base score of 5. The relevant ability is Wisdom/Intuition.

2. If the *Combat & Tactics* fatigue rules are in play, the character point cost is 4.

3. The version of this talent described in the *Combat & Tactics* book works best

with the optional rule for individual initiative in the *Player's Handbook*. If you are using the C&T initiative system, the quickness trait does not affect the character's initiative rolls. Instead, the character can use the skill only during the first round of a combat. A successful skill roll accelerates all the character's actions by one phase, just as if the character had an initiative roll of 1. If the character uses quickness successfully and rolls a 1 for initiative, the character's actions are accelerated by two phases; however, no action can ever be quicker than very fast. If the character successfully uses quickness and rolls a 10 for initiative, the bonus from the trait and the penalty from the initiative roll (see C&T, page 18) cancel each other out.

4. Any character proficient in a martial art can choose a martial arts talent as a general proficiency.

When a dual-classed character uses a pale green ioun stone, are both classes raised one level or just the active class? What happens when a multi-classed character uses the stone?

The stone grants only a single level. A dual-classed character using the stone receives the boost to his active class. A multi-classed character receives the boost to the class in which he has the highest level. Note that the level boost is temporary; if the stone is not circling the character the extra level is lost.

Exactly which spells are subject to elven and half-elven magic resistance?

The question is an old one, but I received several letters on the topic this month. I would prefer to avoid giving an actual list, because new spells are being added to the game all the time. Elven and half-elven resistance to sleep and charm spells applies to most spells, and spell-like effects that cause the subject to fall asleep or fall under another character's continuing influence. Such effects include: *charm monster*, *charm person*, *charm person or mammal*, *domination*, *eyebite* (charm effect only), the sleep effect works normally on elves and half-elves, as do the fear and sicken effects), *fire charm*, *mass charm*, and *sleep*. Magical devices and creature special attacks that duplicate these spells, such as *eyes of charming*, the beholder's charm rays, and the vampire's charm gaze also are subject to elven and half-elven resistance. Sleep-inducing breath weapons, such as the brass dragon's sleep gas, are not. Neither are the *rod of beguiling* or the *rod of rulership*; charm effects from a *staff of commanding* are.

Spells and other effects that merely incapacitate the subjects or that allow only limited control, such as *hold* spells, hypnosis, *suggestion*, *quest*, and *geas* are not subject the elven or half-elven resistance. When there is a reasonable doubt, the DM must decide.

How do you roll an ability check for a character with an exceptional Strength score?

Usually on 1d20, just like any other ability check. An exceptional Strength score grants a character extra combat abilities, but little else. For many feats of sheer strength, a bend bars/lift gates roll is often more appropriate than a Strength ability check. If two character with exceptional Strength scores are making opposed Strength rolls, you might allow the characters to succeed with their Strength rolls on rolls of 19 if they roll less than their exceptional ratings on percentile dice.

Can a *cloud of purification* spell destroy a character who has been reduced to an extremely small height by a *reduce* spell or a powerful curse? The spell melts any creature up to the size of a normal rat and turns it to water. Can a character who has been turned to water be raised, resurrected, or restored with a *wish*?

You shouldn't allow a *cloud of purification* to affect any creature with a full hit die or more. If a level-0 character or creature with less than one hit die has been shrunk, then turned to water by a *cloud of purification* it cannot be raised or reincarnated; however, I would allow a *resurrection* spell to work if the creature's remains haven't been mixed in with a whole lot of water from other creatures. Even so, a substantial penalty to the resurrection survival roll, say 30%, would be in order. A *wish* could bring back the creature in any case.

Just how freely can priest characters choose their spells? Does a priest choose spells one a day? Once a level? As the character needs them? How does a priest go about learning a newly invented spell?

Generally, a priest can freely choose his spells from the spheres and spell levels available to him about once a day. All the character needs is a good night's sleep and time for prayers. The priest requires no spell book and is not in any way hindered by the spells he may have chosen previously. Nevertheless, the priest must memorize his spells ahead of time, he can't simply choose them as needed.

In the case of spells that have been newly introduced into the campaign, the DM is free to decide how priests can get them. If a priest character spends the time and money to research an entirely new spell, no other priest should be able to get it unless the inventor teaches him the spell or he finds the spell on a scroll. Teaching another priest a new spell should take about a day per spell level. Learning a new priest spell from a scroll also should take a day per spell level and the process should consume the scroll (it goes blank when the priest finishes dissecting it). In either case, the priest learn-

ing the spell understands it automatically so long as he is of a level sufficient to cast the spell and the spell is included in a sphere the priest has access to.

If a priest finds a written description of a new spell (as opposed to a magical scroll), the priest should have to research the spell (see *DMG*, Chapter 7, page 64), but the cost should be minimal (100 gp per spell level).

In some very rare cases, the DM might decide to make a new priest spell available to all priests in the campaign. When this happens, the deities who grant the spells simply add them the lists of spells they offer and any priest who has access to the spell's sphere and is high enough level to cast the spells learns it automatically through divine inspiration.

What happens to a character who tries to use a *dimension door* or *teleport* spell and he is carrying too much weight? Does the character still wink out, leaving the excess behind or does the spell fail outright? Can characters prevent an enemy from teleporting away by grappling the opponent and pushing him over the weight limit?

For purposes of game balance, I heartily recommend that any teleportation spell fail outright if the caster is carrying too much weight. Likewise, I suggest that any creature touching the caster count toward the weight the caster is carrying, even if the caster is unwilling. Characters who are quick-witted enough to grab a teleporting creature before it can wink out should be rewarded for their foresight.

Isn't the 4th-level wizard spell *polymorph other* too powerful? What's to prevent a 7th-level transmuter from building two great wyrm dragons a day out of the local rat population? If *polymorph other* were cast on a rat to change it into a gold dragon, there would be more than a 200% chance that the rat would permanently become a dragon, complete with all the dragon's magical and special abilities. Aside from the system shock rolls, saving throws, and the *dispel magic* spell, there seems to be no limit on what a measly 7th-level wizard can do, and the spell is permanent!

It is true that *dispel magic* and system shock rolls are the only limits the rules place on the spell. Other limits come from the DM. It is also true that turning a creature with animal intelligence, such as a rat, into something as smart as a gold dragon makes the creature assuming the mind and abilities of its assumed form inevitable. The *polymorph other* spell, however, is not too powerful at all if the DM is clever.

First, there's nothing in the spell that says the caster gets to pick the transformed creature's age. That's for the DM to decide. You might want to apply the

subject creature's age to the lifespan of the assumed form to determine the assumed form's maturity. In the case of a rat, the resulting dragon is always going to be a hatchling because rats just don't live that long. Or perhaps the subject's level of maturity translates directly into the assumed form's maturity. So if a caster wants a great wyrm dragon he has to find a really old and decrepit rat.

You could really have some fun with a greedy player if you choose the latter option. If the caster picks a young and healthy rat (with a reasonable chance to survive a system shock roll), he should get a hatchling gold dragon. Being young, the dragon is hungry. Being violently thrust into dragonhood, the dragon is shy and insecure. The dragon might follow the character around, eating the character's treasure (gold dragons eat gems), occasionally cutting loose with its breath weapon because it is scared (maybe it saw a cat), and making a general nuisance of itself. Imagine the scene if the dragon visits a jewelry shop for a snack. Being lawful good, the dragon surely will tell the irate jeweler and the town guard where "mom" is.

If the caster chooses a venerable old rat, the creature's system shock percentage should be very low (35% or less); let's face it, old rats aren't going to have really high Constitution scores. If the caster does manage to create a venerable, wyrm, or great wyrm gold dragon, the creature

probably is going to take charge. Gold dragons are lawful good, but no creature with 22 or more hit dice is going to take orders from a measly 7th-level wizard. The dragon might help the character in some small way, but the character probably will find himself embarked on some series of adventures of the dragon's choosing before long. Woe to the character when an errant *dispel magic* spell ends the enchantment and the poor fool is left stranded somewhere with only a mangy rat for company.

Many spells in the game are prone to abuse, but only if the DM lets players get away with it. Greedy NPCs, of course, usually get their comeuppance out offstage. It might be amusing to stage an encounter with an enchanted gold dragon and its unwilling wizard servant as a cautionary tale to the players.

How many people are affected by a *hold person* spell? The earlier part of the spell description says that 1d4 people are affected, which suggest that there is a random die roll. Later, however, the spell description says that the caster chooses which creatures in the area of effect are affected. Which is correct?

The spell affects 1 to 4 creatures at the caster's option. The references to 1d4 creatures are errors.

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Matching Monsters and Scenarios in Call of Cthulhu

by Gregory W. Detwiler

Artwork by Jim Holloway and Michael Scott

Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* * game is replete with the monsters of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, with more being created all the time in both game supplements and literature by would-be "new Lovecrafts." This article gives examples of just how the monsters that already exist can best fit into scenarios. We're not dealing with the massive Great Old Ones and Outer Gods here, but with the "lesser" creatures that are far more common in a campaign. This list of ideas is not inclusive, of course; feel free to come up with your own. The list is restricted to creatures in the normal waking world.

The Creatures

Byakhee: Given the resemblance of these things to the gargoyles of the Middle Ages, the best place to start here is at an old haunted castle of that period. Perhaps the castle's main claim to fame is that it is not only decorated with "gargoyles" (*à la* Notre Dame Cathedral), but that at regular intervals, one or more of these ugly but innocent-seeming "statues" may wind up missing, and always when a horrible murder or mysterious disappearance takes place in the region. This is a good way to introduce into a campaign; the shock of the "gargoyles" actions won't be as great if the investigators have seen byakhee before. Perhaps in the depths of



the castle is a gate leading to the great Library of Celaeno, which is guarded by hordes of these things.

Given the fact that byakhee are able to fly through the vacuum of space-sometimes with a suitably protected rider-this is a great monster to spring on astronaut PCs in the *Cthulhu Now* supplement. If the investigators are at all connected with the government, they may be called upon to investigate the losses of orbiting satellites and spacecraft, and perhaps even deaths and sabotage at a top-secret lunar colony. The fact that byakhee are vulnerable to ordinary weapons will not eliminate terror here; how many astronauts carry guns? And unless they have recoilless arms, a shootout in a zero-gravity environment can be hazardous. Investigators will have to rely on improvised weapons, mostly melee arms, as in *Alien 3*. Of course, Ripley didn't have spells like *shriveling* at her disposal.

Chthonians: Read Brian Lumley's novel *The Burrowers Beneath* for inspiration. The quickest and most blatant explanation for their introduction could be a massive earthquake, either caused by them or a natural one that happens to expose a path to their underground cities. On a less apocalyptic scale-at least at first-is the "missing miner" adventure, where workers in a deep mine are disappearing or dying horribly. This works particularly

well if previous work crews have uncovered any spherical mineral formations and brought them to the surface. (Trekkies have noted by now the resemblance to the adventure with the burrowing Horta in the old *Star Trek* episode, "Devil in the Dark.") And if the PCs break any of those formations, we now have a vendetta that will last until (and probably bring about) the end of the campaign.

Chthonians are also good for a phony "vampire" scenario, as they drain blood from their victims. A party of investigators could hear of hapless locals being drained of blood in the vicinity of an old monastery (which is in turn near an abandoned mine) and hear local legends of how the monks-whose Gregorian chanting can still be heard from time to time-strayed from the path of righteousness and were turned into vampires as punishment. Any PCs who draw obvious, but quite erroneous, conclusions from this and show up with garlic and wooden stakes will soon wish they'd brought along heavy artillery instead. Similar legends could arise around an old abandoned mission in Africa, say, near a certain deserted city...

Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath: If you want to adventure in a forested area, you've got to include at least one of these things. There's nothing better for turning a "haunted forest" into the real thing. Aside

from the standard scenario of racing to prevent "evil druids" from sacrificing innocent victims to the Dark Young and commanding them to attack the locals, we have some great surprise scenarios.

Imagine going for an innocent walk in the woods, or having a picnic there, and running into a Dark Young. Less innocently, at certain times of the year, a hunting party can run into one instead of its usual prey. At least the PCs already have their guns handy (for all the good they'll do). In the modern era, biologists can be conducting a wildlife survey, to discover a more varied fauna than they counted on.

Here's an idea for you: Assume the party discovers that there is a gate leading back to medieval Scotland and Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* was based on a more horrid event than history records. Maybe the party will discover that Macduff lost something of his purity in preparing for vengeance against his enemy. Does everyone remember the line "till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane"? Now what kind of "trees" could possibly walk up to a castle and attack, hmm? Between Macbeth's crimes and the monsters of the Mythos, investigators could well be hard-pressed to decide which side they would fight on, if either. Lay on, Randolph Carter!

Deep Ones: The standard adventure here is "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," in which the investigators blunder into a town of weirdos, all of whom have the "Innsmouth look." This is a highly dangerous scenario, not least because your players may turn on you for running such a derivative adventure. Try small-scale raids for an opening adventure, where deep ones in a coastal area are kidnapping locals for their own nefarious purposes, and the investigators must rescue them before it is too late. Alternately, the party could try and capture a deep one for experimental purposes, to determine the secret of immortality.

Underwater exploration is one of the best ways to encounter deep ones, particularly as the human PCs have a built-in handicap called "air supply," which is guaranteed to increase tension in any encounter. While diving suits exist in the original game, diving is far more common in the modern world of *Cthulhu Now*, a supplement which has a complete listing of scuba gear and-in the first adventure-stats for underwater weaponry such as spearguns and bang-sticks. The odds would certainly be improved in combat, though the outcome of the fighting would by no means be a foregone conclusion.

Perhaps a local island or cove is the scene for legends about merfolk, with disappearances of fishermen and beach-combers being attributed to beautiful mermaids luring them away. Embracing a "mermaid" that turns out to be a deep one cloaked with a magical illusion would



certainly run up the SAN loss.

Illusions work for totally human forms as well; vacationing investigators who want to flirt with the local beach bunnies may get more than they bargained for. For that matter, deep ones who can pass as humans (perhaps due to a magical "cultural exchange" with the serpent people) could infiltrate coastal communities without fear of an impending "Innsmouth look" blowing their cover. Hybrids in the early stages of this condition should be far more common, however, and would make equally good spies.

Dholes: Aside from the physical appearance on the scene of a Great Old One like Cthulhu, this is CoC's best candidate for a Godzilla-style scenario. Take a look at the comparative size listings for humans and Mythos monsters, and pay particular attention to the greater and lesser dholes. The greater dholes are too big to fit on a two-page spread. Magical gates are a vital necessity if the scenario is to have a dhole, whether to bring one to Earth, or to cause the party to travel to a world inhabited by them. Without massive firepower, however, investigators will be able to do little other than run around screaming in terror.

Dimensional Shambler: These ape/insects deserve more attention than they've gotten in literature. Their only appearance so far has been in the H.P. Lovecraft/Hazel Heald collaboration, "The Horror in the Museum." Still, a creature that can pop in and out of various dimensions at will is not an opponent to be ignored. Although they have middling armor protection at best (as Mythos monsters go), their ability to simply leave a combat zone for another universe is a far better defense than a thick hide.

They are also thieves and kidnappers *par excellence*, and a rash of unexplained disappearances and robberies is the best way to introduce them into a campaign. A war with them could be the ultimate guerrilla conflict.

Fire Vampires: These creatures generally appear only as summoned attackers, whether the one who called them forth is an evil occultist or the Great Old One Cthugha himself. Thus, unless the party blunders into a gate leading to the fire vampire's point of origin, they will only face them in the standard "summoned monsters attack locals" scenario.

Flying Polyps: These are ideal inhabitants of lonely valleys and canyons where the wind blows frequently and no humans live (at least for long). Any mysterious windstorm, particularly one that destroys out-of-the-way communities, has the potential for being an eruption of flying polyps.

Remember that these creatures are a dying race. Imagine the trouble a party of

investigators can run into if they take a gate back to prehistoric times, when the polyps strove with the Great Race of Yith for dominance, or worse yet, when they were the sole rulers of the world c. 600 million BC.

For that matter, time travel can land the party in trouble with a wide variety of the alien races of the Cthulhu Mythos.

Because the polyps currently dwell underground, they-like the chthonians-may be discovered by hapless miners or spelunkers, or an earthquake may give them access to the outer world. In fact, a chthonian-induced earthquake may have two objectives: to damage the community itself, and to create a passageway that will allow subterranean monsters like the polyps or the formless spawn (see below) to come to the surface and wreak their own havoc.

Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua: These monsters are more cave-dwellers that come to the surface as a result of mining operations or earthquakes. The spawn provide the keeper with a bit more variety than other monsters, because of their many attack forms. Indeed, there is no reason the Keeper should restrict himself to the whip, tentacle, bite, and bludgeon attacks in the rulebook; the shapechanging nature of the spawn means that any

other physical attack he can think of could be introduced. Consider them the ultimate dungeon monsters.

Ghouk: In Lovecraft's short story "Pickman's Model," the author said ghouls live in sizeable tunnel complexes beneath many cities, with easy access to graveyards; but this is not the only place one can encounter them. The story itself shows the possibility of their appearing in anyone's basement or cellar. Pickman's painting, "Subway Accident," even displays them attacking people on a subway platform. It takes little imagination to come up with a series of hit-and-run attacks all over town, with entire families disappearing from their homes overnight, or the residents of apartment buildings suffering the same fate, with only a hole in the basement to show where they went. Eventually, the investigators will have to make their way through the narrow, cramped tunnels to confront the raiders.

For *Cthulhu Now* enthusiasts who favor a secret government war against the beings of the Mythos, imagine the trouble that could arise from ghouls breaking into bomb shelters, underground military or presidential command posts, etc. A nuclear crisis would certainly be more interesting if accompanied by a coincidental(?) ghoul invasion of NORAD headquar-



ters at Cheyenne Mountain. With natural or magical earthquakes, of course, the same invasion could be attempted by any of the other underground races of the Mythos.

Gnoph-Keh: Due to their choice of habitat, these creatures should only be found in an arctic or antarctic adventure. Aside from guardians of ancient ruins, these creatures serve best in the "Mythos monster attacks isolated human settlements" scenario. Given their freezing and blizzard powers, there is a good chance that the first attacks will be written off as hostile acts of nature. Thus, if the party is cut off from civilization by one of those attacks—say, the personnel at an isolated railway depot are frozen to death—outside help could be a long time in coming.

Great Race of Yith: The only realistic scenario for meeting these beings is time travel, but with two subcategories. Either the investigators travel back in time to encounter them, or they must deal with one or more "possessed"

humans with Yithian minds in their bodies. For a really nasty variant, have the entire party of investigators get their minds displaced into the distant past by a team of Yithians.

Not only will they have to accustom themselves to their new conelike bodies before they can even think of escaping, but the actions of the Yithian team in their old bodies can provide endless complications in the campaign long after that particular adventure has ended. With all the weird research that the studious Yithians engage in, who knows what the investigators might wind up in the middle of when they return to their original bodies?

Hounds of Tindalos: As with the great race, the hounds will only be encountered when one side or the other is engaged in time travel. If the party doesn't encounter them on their home territory, then escaping the hounds it might seem to be a simple matter of waiting out in a room with no corners (every party should have a room in their headquarters prepared for this purpose); but as stated in the original Frank Belknap Long story, "The Hounds of Tindalos," they can get help to break through (in the form of earthquakes and the like) from fellow Mythos monsters such as the chthonians. Wealthy dilettantes might consider funding the construction of a room-sized spherical chamber of steel, which can take a great deal of external abuse without changing its shape.

Hunting Horrors: Like fire vampires, these creatures generally appear only when someone or something has summoned them. In that case, the party's mission might be to defend their designated target; or they may be the target themselves. A scenario that combines action with detective work can pit the party against an occultist that keeps sending hunting horrors or other summoned monsters against them, to keep them from finding him. Only by slaying him can the party bring the attacks to an end, and for every day of sloppy detective work, there is an attack by some horror the following night. This gives the investigators

prehistoric fauna somewhere in the tropics, only to discover a major outpost of these monsters, is also viable. This last, incidentally, best works in the Victorian Era supplement, *Cthulhu By Gaslight**, when there were still plenty of blank spaces on the map. At any rate, an opponent who can draw off your own magic points to destroy you with is not to be sneezed at.

W-Go: We've covered a number of monsters that might be uncovered by human miners; now we come to beings that maintain mining colonies of their own on

Earth. Because these are organized beings like the deep ones, they are particularly dangerous to intruders; especially when they have cultists as agents

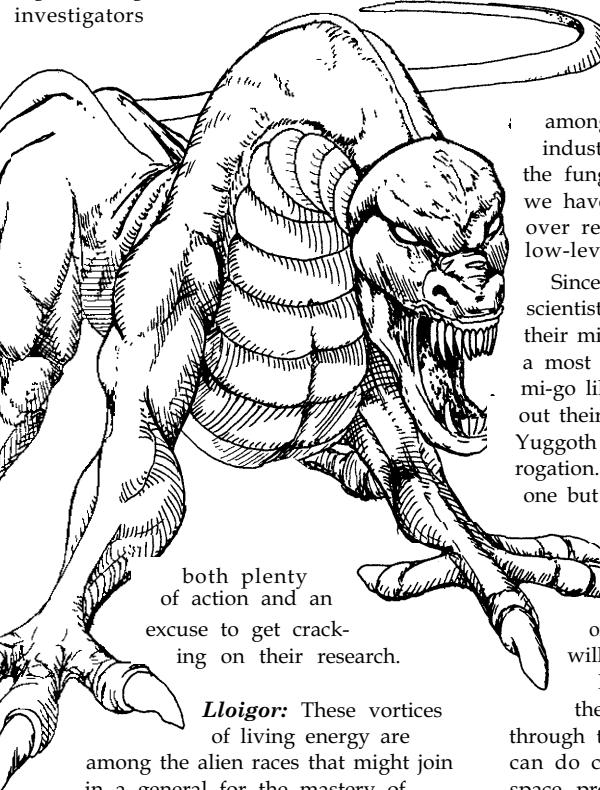
among the local population. If human industry has uses for the same minerals the fungi from Yuggoth are mining, then we have the potential for a full-scale war over resources, not just the standard low-level conflict.

Since the party is likely to know a few scientists, even if they don't have any in their midst, we also have the potential for a most unusual kidnapping scenario. The mi-go like to kidnap men of learning, cut out their living brains, and ship them to Yuggoth in metal cylinders for later interrogation. Would-be rescuers now have not one but two deadlines to beat: the brain surgery as well as the actual transport of the victim to Yuggoth. If they miss the first deadline but not the second, the kidnap victim's ultimate fate will be very interesting.

Note that the mi-go share with the byakhee the ability to fly through the vacuum of space, so they, too, can do considerable damage to human space programs in *Cthulhu Now*.

Since the fungi from Yuggoth can form organized armies and there is high-tech equipment to arm them with, apocalyptic Keepers may consider them the likeliest candidates for a Mythos version of the *War of the Worlds*. Imagine the confusion when alien armies drop in from space without any spacecraft being sighted, even assuming ghouls or other creatures aren't attacking those same headquarters simultaneously. Wells' Martians had more common courtesy than that.

Nightgaunts: These mysterious beings are mainly encountered in lonely areas such as caverns, deep forest, and old ruins. Aside from the obvious action involved in fighting off an attack, consider the "occult detective" scenario, in which the party must discover the location of a previous victim (either a party member or an NPC) and rescue him.

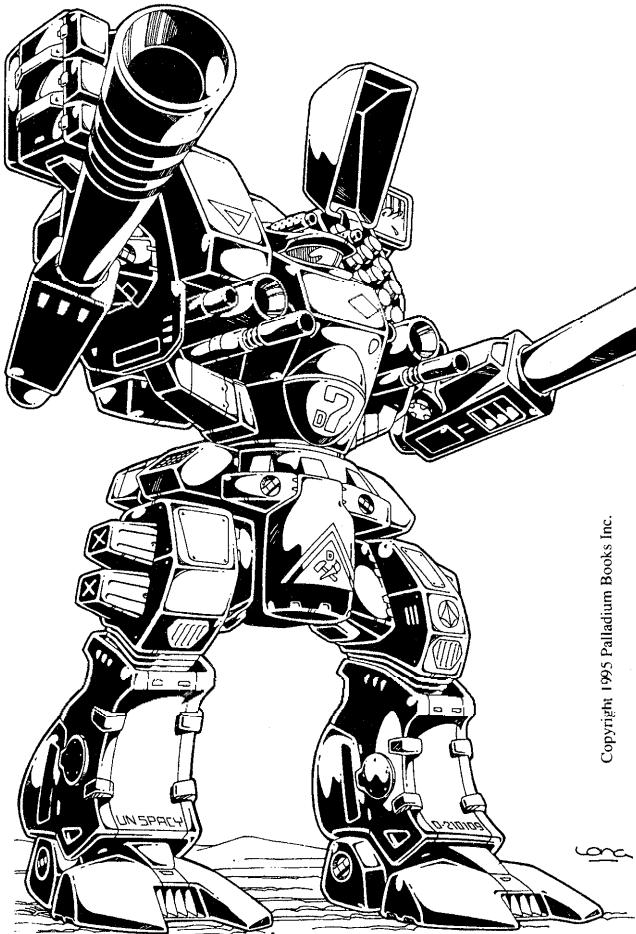


Lloigor: These vortices of living energy are among the alien races that might join in a general for the mastery of

Earth. Granted, their eternal pessimism may combine with the might of the opposition to make them doubt victory, but even many humans who despair of victory in war have fought to the bitter end. Since they can drain magic points from human victims and use that power to create telekinetic effects and destructive implosions—to say nothing of being able to pass through walls in their natural state—their pessimistic doubts of victory may well be unwarranted.

In their natural form, lloigor are excellent occupants of "haunted houses." Poltergeist effects and frequent illness among human residents can be easily explained by their powers. Their more spectacular appearance is as giant mutant reptiles resembling dinosaurs and dragons. Any number of "sea serpent" reports can be explained by the lloigor, and such reports can be bait to draw in innocent investigators.

The "lost world" scenario, in which explorers investigate rumors of an isolated



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Old Ones: Here's yet another race best suited to a time-travel adventure, though the Old Ones may still have colonies in the depths of the ocean. Unless the party is involved in a SeaQuest-style oceanic colony or survey ship, there's not much chance of investigators running into these things in a modern scenario. Unless... We keep reading in Lovecraft about how all these alien races came to Earth, but, save for the Great Race of Yith, it was never specifically stated that *all* the aliens left their home planet or system to come here. Earth might just be a colony to the Old Ones, mi-go, star-spawn, etc.; possibly one of many. After so many millions of years, even the most insensitive aliens might send a military team to investigate the lack of contact with the colony and find out where everyone's gone.

We have here a true apocalyptic scenario: a colonial war between at the very least the Old Ones, mi-go, star-spawn of Cthulhu, and possibly the flying polyps. Other Mythos races, of course, can get involved in the fighting, while mankind would be in the dubious position of the American Indians when the English, French, Spanish, and Dutch came to the New World.

Even if human vermin are deemed too lowly to serve as allies in battle, a lot of innocent bystanders are certain to get caught up in the fighting. Investigators

could be reporters or government agents sent in to monitor the fighting, watching out not only for the combatants, but also for cultists and Yithian military historians who like tidy records. Between the alien anatomy of the star-spawn and polyps, the high-tech weaponry of the mi-go, and the genetic engineering skill of the Old Ones (remember, these are the guys who gave us the shoggoths), it's anyone's guess who would win in the end.

Sand-Dwellers: These monsters may generally be used only as desert marauders and as guardians of sacred sites in the arid regions of the world. Irem, the City of Pillars in the Arabian Desert, would seem to be the best candidate for such guardianship. Any archaeological expedition seeking ancient relics may face far more trouble than the curse of some dead pharaoh. Oil companies planting rigs all over the Sahara are also potential targets. For a modern Them scenario, try using nuclear radiation in places like the Negev, Los Alamos, Outer Mongolia, and China's Sinkiang province to beef up the critters in *Cthulhu Now*.

Serpent People: Thanks to the writings of Lovecraft's pen pal Robert E. Howard, this is the race for the "aliens among us" adventure. Before creating Conan, Howard wrote about the adventures of Conan's ancestor, Kull of Atlantis, king of

the Pre-Cataclysmic kingdom of Valusia. In the short story, "The Shadow Kingdom," Howard vividly describes a kingdom riddled with agents of the serpent people, who use their illusory magic to appear as human beings and infiltrate the highest positions of power. Paranoia should reign supreme among the investigators once it has been established that serpent people are about.

With their history of empires in the Permian Period, they are among the likeliest of other races to join the warfare mentioned in the Old Ones section. Curiously, both they and the flying polyps build cities of black basalt; did one race usurp the cities of the other? We may have here a grudge among the polyps second only to that against the Great Race of Yith.

Servitors of the Outer Gods: These horrors are rarely found alone, at least for long, being often in the company of the Outer Gods themselves or various creatures they have "whistled up" using their own magic. They may also provide musical accompaniment to groups of insane cultists, as in Lovecraft's short story, "The Festival." With their ability to get help by summoning other monsters, they also make good sentries at sacred sites and the like. If a party encounters one acting in this capacity, they would be well-advised to kill it quickly, before it can summon reinforcements. One Mythos monster is bad enough.

Shans: The insects from Shaggai are refugees from their home planet, which is slowly being eaten by what is apparently the granddaddy of all dholes. With their ability to fly into human brains and take control of men's minds, shans are among the most insidious of the Mythos threats to Earth. An adventure featuring them almost invariably concerns itself with PC attempts to both resist possession themselves and keep the shans from controlling anyone else. If someone's mind does get grabbed, it'll take some pretty powerful magic to throw the thing out again. Note that infiltration by agents who are already possessed will be a major threat.

Shantaks: These horse-headed, slimy flying things share with the byakhee and the mi-go the ability to fly through the vacuum of space, possibly with a rider, and are thus good encounters for space travelers in *Cthulhu Now*. They are, however, among the least likely of Mythos monsters to be encountered on their own, as their *raison d'être* is to serve as steeds for others. If PCs in the standard or modern campaigns can get their hands on one or more military aircraft, we have the potential for a rather bizarre dogfight.

Shoggoths: Originally created as servants of the Old Ones, the shoggoths rebelled



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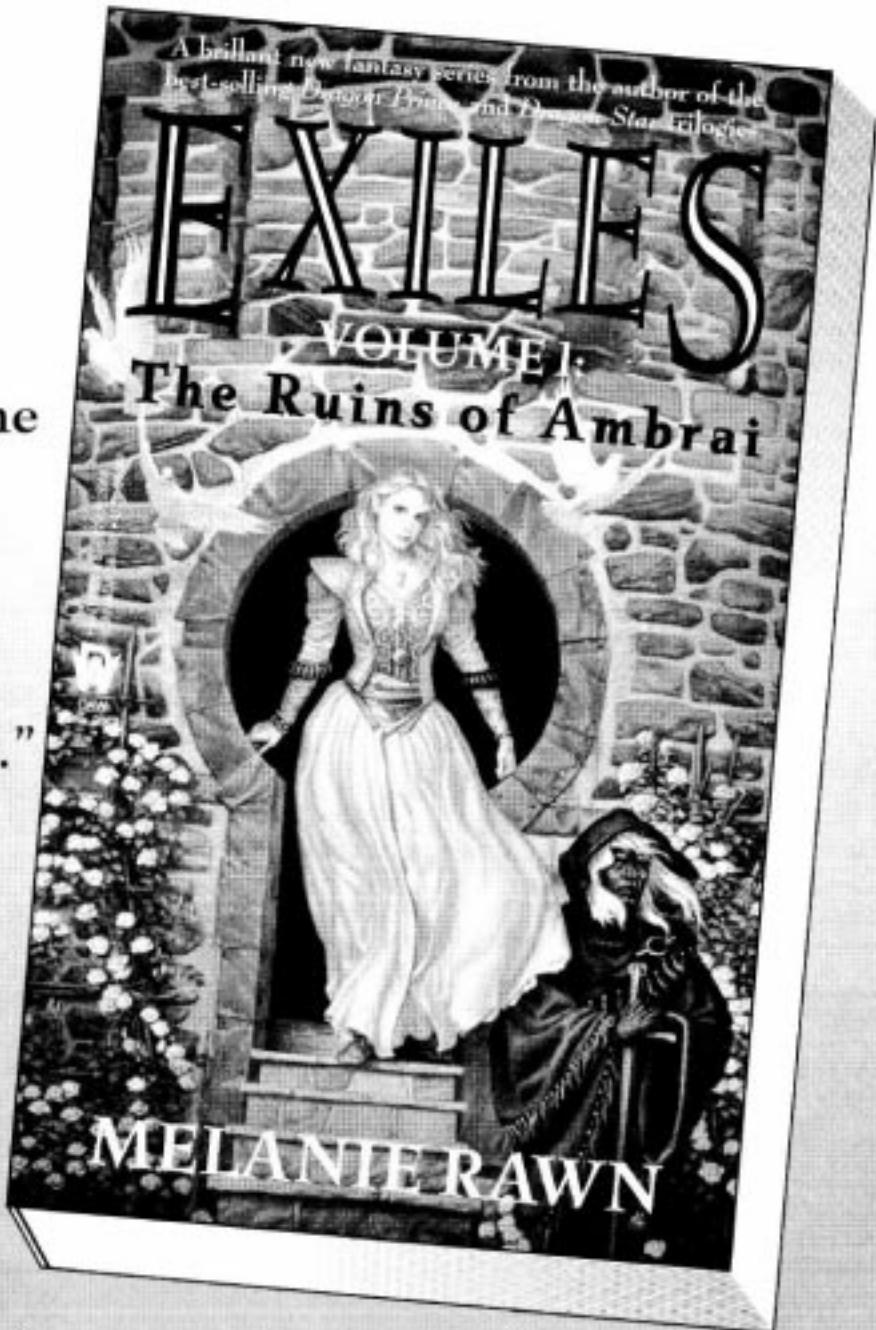


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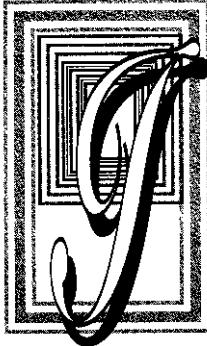
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t wasn't growing old that bothered Adarr so much as it was the cold.

The knight shivered, causing the dented steel plates of his suit of armor to rattle like so many pots and pans dropped by a careless scullery boy. He lifted his faded

blue eyes from the book on the table before him, his breath fogging on the air of the castle's library. The flames in the fireplace had dwindled to a handful of glowing coals, and frigid knives of winter wind sliced through chinks in the stone walls.

Standing with care, Adarr moved clinkingly toward the fireplace. His armor seemed to attract the cold, magnifying it. Perhaps Her Majesty, Queen Alisende—may the green spring ever follow in her footsteps—was right. Perhaps he shouldn't wear his armor around the castle anymore. Yet he was the Queen's Champion, the First Knight in the kingdom of Felthfinfar. And even if it was because he was the *only* knight left in the kingdom of Felthfinfar, well then, it only made the need to keep up appearances all the greater. Adarr's speed and vigor may have declined with the steady graying of his hair. His sense of propriety had not.

Bending stiffly, Adarr laid a piece of wood on the coals. Flames curled around the branch, bright but woefully small. However, he could spare no more fuel for the fire. Over the last centuries, the little vale of Felthfinfar had been gleaned of all its trees, so that hardly a stick remained. True, there was much wood to be had in the tangled grove which grew just east of the castle. But the villagers held that the forest was haunted by fairies and elfkin, and so dared not venture within.

Adarr returned to his book. He had read it before, of course. In the entire library of Felthfinfar there were only seven books. Once there had been more, each filled with glorious tales of days past. But over time these had been spirited away, bit by bit, to line the nests of mice. Fortunately, Adarr was not a quick reader. Besides, he spent much of the time simply gazing at the drawings that filled the margins: winding leaves, barb-tailed wyrms, and knights on thundering chargers, all woven together, flowing from page to page, like an inky dream.

Squinting his old eyes to bring the letters into focus, he delved again into the tome before him. Yet before long Adarr sighed and shut the book. For some reason he found no comfort in history today. His bones ached, and shadows stole into his heart. Even when Adarr had been a boy, in the time of King Aldared the Old, the days of glory had been no more than stories—the days when Felthfinfar had boasted a hundred knights, and feasts were held every Sunsday in the depths of winter, and pennants of sky blue had flown from every turret of the castle. Much had diminished in Felthfinfar in the centuries since. Piece by piece it had all vanished—the knights, the feasts, the majesty—just like the books in the library. Adarr wondered what

WINTER'S KNIGHT

By Mark Anthony

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

would happen when the last of the books, and all its brittle memories, was finally gone. Would Felthfinfar itself just fade away?

"Well, isn't that a cheerful expression," said a gruff but oddly high-pitched voice. "If you're determined to wear such a sour face, Adarr, the least you could do is lower your visor so the rest of us don't have to see it."

Adarr looked up in startlement, then frowned, his gray mustaches drooping beneath his sharp nose. "Oh, it's you, Rufret," he said, his deep voice rumbling inside his breastplate.

The dog gave the knight a toothy smile. "Don't pretend you're not overjoyed to see me," the hound said. "If you had a tail, Adarr, it would be wagging." Rufret flicked his own fluffy tail for emphasis.

Adarr only glared in reply. However, even he was forced to admit that Rufret was a handsome dog. His snowy fur was thick, and dotted here and there by dark speckles. One of his pointed ears was white, the other coal black, and a black patch encircled one intelligent eye. The village wise-women held that, long ago, a fairy wolf bore a litter to a king of Felthfinfar's favorite hunting hound. Whether the legend was true or not, it was a fact that in the vale, every twenty years or so, a mundane dog gave birth to a talking pup. Perhaps he was old-fashioned, but Adarr found he preferred usual dogs to the talking variety. They weren't nearly so impertinent. Besides, even if the choices were slim these days, Alisende deserved a more proper seneschal.

"So, aren't you going to ask what I came here for?" Rufret's eager voice verged on a bark.

"I didn't recall that one ever had to ask you to start talking," Adarr replied without irony.

Since this was merely a fact, Rufret took no insult. "The Queen asked me to find you. This morning, in the village of Foxfale, an ox and two pigs were found mauled in their pens. It seems there is a strange creature on the prowl."

Adarr sat up, straightening his shoulders. A strange creature? He wondered what it could possibly be. No animal more dangerous than a badger had prowled within the borders of Felthfinfar in a century. Whatever this new creature was, it must have crept down from the mountains that surrounded the kingdom, or perhaps out of the white wastes of the Evering Ice to the north, looking for food.

Feeling a sudden warmth that the feeble fire could not account for, Adarr stood. "I will attend my Queen at once." Without waiting for Rufret's reply, he strode from the library as swiftly as his stiff joints allowed, sword and scabbard slapping against his thigh. The dog jogged merrily at his heels, following the knight through the castle's shabby corridors.

Knight and dog passed through a long room that had been the castle's Great Hall. Once bright revels had been held here. Now the Hall was empty, save for a tapestry draped across one wall. The weaving was dark with soot and time, slumping in places, moth-eaten in others. Despite this, figures could still be

made out in the gloom of the tapestry. Though he had passed it a thousand times before, Adarr could not help pausing a moment to regard the scene rendered in colored thread.

It was a wyrm-slaying.

They did battle upon a brown and withered landscape: Champion and Wyrm. The wyrm stood upright on its two crooked legs, tall as a tall man, stubby wings folded behind its sinuous back, barbed tail coiled tightly. The creature's neck was cocked back, its hooked muzzle open skyward in a terrible cry, curved claws ripping dark furrows in the barren ground. Perhaps it was simply a trick of air ruffling the fabric, yet lithe muscles seemed to ripple beneath countless bejeweled scales.

The champion was no less glorious. A blazing sun-face adorned her breastplate, and her horned helm was crowned with a flowing mane of horse hair. As if freezing a moment in time, the weaver had caught her in the act of plunging her shining spear into the soft flesh of the wyrm's pale breast. A stream of dark red poured from the wound, and where the wyrm's blood rained upon it, the land was changed from lifeless brown to verdant green.

Legends told that, when the ships first landed on the shores of Orillion, the wyrms were each defeated by a single champion. Each champion then claimed the lands that had belonged to the wyrm and ruled over these as king or queen. Perhaps the stories were true enough. Certainly the first champions had been more powerful than any who had come after. Even at the height of their glory, the nine lands in exile-of which Felthfinfar was the least and northernmost-had been but shadows of the might and majesty of the Kingdom Over-the-Sea. For much had been lost after the flight to Orillion.

In recent years, when Telurvan's wyrm awoke, not a single champion hunted the creature, but an army.

Adarr counted himself lucky to have been alive for the wakening of a wyrm. It had been half a century since the last time a wyrm had stalked Orillion when Telur crept from its hidden lair to ravage the kingdom of Telurvan, just to the south. Adarr had been a child of no more than four winters at the time. His father had taken him over the mountains, to watch as the king's army marched past in all its splendor. When the army marched back, it was no more than half as large as it had been before, and the king of Telurvan himself came, not on the back of his charger, but lying on his shield, eyes covered with gold coins, hands clasped on his broken spear in the final embrace of death.

Yet the quest had been successful. Telur had been wounded, its blood spilled upon the ground, and the wyrm had crept back to its lair to sleep, until such time as it should wake again. It was said that the blood of a wyrm renewed the land. Certainly it was true that, for many decades after, Telurvan knew great prosperity. Harvests were bountiful. Herds multiplied. And the children born were stronger and fairer than any in living memory.

No wyrn had woken since the days of Telur. Now some spoke that the wyrms were fading away, that perhaps they were truly dead now. Adarr did not know if this was true or not, but he feared that, if the wyrms died, then all of Orillion would pass with them.

"Come now, Adarr," Rufret growled, circling the knight's legs. "Have you grown so doddering that you've already forgotten where we were going?"

Adarr's gaunt cheeks reddened. "Certainly not!" he replied in defense. Moments later they reached the door of the queen's chamber. Adarr entered, Rufret a half-step behind.

She turned from the frosted window out of which she had been gazing and smiled.

Adarr's heart skipped a beat in his chest—a most disconcerting sensation at his age. Each time he was away from her, he forgot how fair and bright was his Queen. She was as pale as the winter outside, and her hair as dark as the soil beneath the snow. But her eyes were the color of bright sunlight on leaves, and her simple gown was of robin's breast red. Above her heart was a brooch fashioned from a single jewel as green as her eyes.

Alisende had come to the throne early—too early, and by tragedy, for her parents had died before their time. Not long after, the kingdom nearly lost Alisende as well. Ever a bold child, she had dared to wander into the forest behind the castle. She was not found until three days later when Adarr himself came upon her, wet and cold, on the edge of the forest. Of her three day adventure she had never spoken a word, though she wore the brooch as a memory, for she had been clutching the green stone in a small hand as she stumbled from the trees. These days Alisende was, if no less bold, a good deal more tempered. She bore the mantle of rule capably upon her slender shoulders, though she had only just reached her nineteenth winter.

"Sir Champion, Lord Seneschal, come in," she spoke in a clear voice, and they did as she bade.

Adarr frowned at the small chamber. It was furnished with only a table, a pair of benches, and a lone chair by the fire. Rushes rather than carpets covered the cold stone floor. This was hardly a proper room in which for a queen to hold audience; however, Alisende had decided that the castle's throne room was too large and required too much precious wood to heat. She was a terribly practical young woman.

Even granted her keen wit and sound judgment, it was something of a miracle that Alisende kept the kingdom functioning. She had a talent for making much out of little. If she discovered a bent copper coin in a forgotten storeroom, she extended it as far as fifty. It was only through her efforts that the folk of Felthfinfar remained clothed and fed. Yet even Alisende could not perform magic, and every day there was less for her to work with. It was wrong that she had to bear the burden of rule alone, Adarr thought. A queen as wise and beautiful as Alisende should have a dozen noble suitors: all strong, and handsome, and kind.

"Greetings, Your Highness." Adarr began to kneel, both armor and joints creaking alarmingly.

She lifted a hand. "Please, Adarr—you know that's not necessary."

Adarr only gritted his teeth, sinking until his knee touched the floor. A champion must kneel in the presence of his queen. Despite the chill, a sweat had sprung out on his forehead.

"Get down, you fool hound," he hissed out of the corner of his mouth. He smacked Rufret's shaggy rump with a hard gauntlet. The seneschal let out a yelp of surprise and promptly flopped onto his belly. Alisende's expression remained solemn, but mirth danced in her leaf-green eyes.

"Rise," she said after a moment.

Rufret hopped quickly to his four feet. Adarr followed suit more slowly. "There is trouble afoot in your realm, my queen?" he asked, struggling for breath.

Concern showed in her expression, but whether for her land or her champion was unclear. "If certain excitable individuals have performed their tasks correctly—" she gave Rufret a pointed look—"then you know of the animals that were mauled in the village of Foxdale. That meat which was not consumed by the creature was tainted by some dark humour, and had to be burned." Alisende shook her head, resting a slender hand on the back of the lone chair. "Those animals would have been enough to feed three families for the winter. The kingdom cannot afford to lose any more livestock to this marauding beast."

Adarr needed to hear no more. It had been long years since he had been given a task worthy of a champion. "Very well, Your Majesty. I will journey to Foxdale and find the trail of this creature."

Alisende bit her lip, then took a step toward the knight. "Are you certain that you... that you wish to go, Adarr? I could send a group of villagers instead."

Adarr winced, knowing the question that truly weighed on her mind, but which she was too kindly to voice. He gripped the hilt of his sword defiantly. He was not yet ready to become a toothless uncle who spent his days huddled by the fire, telling stories of the old days no one wished to hear.

"Have the villagers guard their animals," he said with authority. "I will see to the creature myself." He drew his sword, to receive her blessing upon it.

Rufret let out a startled yip, and Alisende gazed at Adarr in concern. The knight stared at the blade. A long crack snaked down the length of old, polished steel. *A knight who so draweth a broken blade shall break himself ere the sun doth set.* So the old adage went. Adarr gripped the hilt of the sword tightly to keep his hand from shaking.

Alisende moved swiftly, reaching up to take a bright sword that hung on one wall. She held the blade toward Adarr. "This sword was my fathers. There is no finer in the kingdom. It will serve you well."

Pushing aside his misgivings, Adarr set down his sword and took the new blade, sliding it into his scabbard. He was too old to believe in superstition.

He bowed his head. "Thank you, Your Majesty."

She smiled, but the expression seemed tight. "Let me give you one more gift, Sir Adarr. If you will not take any villagers with you, then take this token for luck." She unfastened the brooch from her dress and stepped forward, clasping the green gem to the collar of Adarr's cloak. As she stepped back, she brushed her smooth hand across his withered cheek. "Be careful, my champion."

Adarr blinked in surprise. Truly he was the most fortunate knight in all Orillion, to serve such a wondrous queen. "I will, Your Majesty."

Alisende nodded, and with that he was dismissed. He departed her chamber and, now filled with excitement at his quest, strode outside into the castle's muddy courtyard. He was surprised and annoyed to notice a white-and-black form jogging alongside him.

"What are you doing, Rufret?"

"Coming with you, of course," the seneschal replied.

Adarr glowered at the dog. He wasn't certain he at all cared for this development. "I thought you didn't like to get your paws dirty."

"I'll make an exception. If you're really going to track this creature, you'll need this nose of mine. Besides, I've made a vow to serve my queen, too, you know."

Adarr snorted, but did not disagree. Oddly, he was almost glad for the company. "Just keep your mouth shut, or the beast will hear your chattering a league away."

It was midmorning when knight and seneschal set forth from the castle. Adarr guided his mount, Ash-a sturdy, soot-black destrier whose graying muzzle belied his own advancing years-between the castle's lopsided gates. The butt of a wooden lance rested in his stirrup, and he gripped the shaft with a gauntleted hand. Rufret pranced beside horse and rider, pink tongue hanging out of his mouth, black nose testing the sharp winter air. The day was clear and bitterly cold, and the muddy road had frozen solid. Soon the disheveled castle stood behind them like the cast-off toy of a giant's child. Just beyond, to the east, lay the feathery wall of the forest. But it was to the west that Adarr and Rufret turned their faces.

By the time they reached Foxdale, icicles hung from Adarr's mustaches, and his armor seemed forged of ice rather than steel. In contrast, Rufret was panting, his breath clouding on the air, warm inside his shaggy coat. Not to be outdone by a dog, Adarr pushed aside thoughts of discomfort and set his mind to the quest.

Of Felthfinfar's three villages, Foxdale was the furthest from the castle and closest to the tumbled gray foothills of the western mountains. A score of motley, thatch-roofed cottages stood around a common field and a stone well. All the doors and windows were shut tight. A thin blue layer of smoke hung over the village like a hazy fog of fear.

With Rufret in tow, Adarr rode through the village, knocking on doors with the butt of his lance. "Open in the name of the Queen!" he commanded each time,

and each time the portal would reluctantly obey as frightened eyes peered out. From most of the cottages drifted soft lowing and the warm smell of animals. It was Adarr's hope that the villagers might have seen the marauding beast, but this hope proved false. The creature had come in the dim hours before dawn, and naught had been seen save the mayhem in its wake.

"Follow its spoor," cackled an old woman from the shadows of her ramshackle cottage. "Then you'll know what it looks like, Sir Champion. Then you'll know!"

The crone was right.

It did not take Adarr and Rufret long to find the place where the animals had been slain. The wall of a pen had been shattered as if made of glass rather than stone. Within the pen the ground was trampled, and pools of frozen blood stood in strange footprints. Adarr peered down from Ash's back. He had never seen tracks like this before: three toes splayed forward, one thicker digit pointed behind. By the deep holes pressed into the mud, each toe had ended in a long talon. They almost reminded him of the tracks of a bird, only larger. Far larger.

He shook his head, muttering under his mustaches. "By the Light Over-the-Sea, what is this beast?"

"Looks like we can follow these if we want to find out," Rufret barked excitedly.

Like rubies scattered upon white linen, the bloody trail stood out clearly against the snow. Adarr spurred Ash into a canter. With a yelp, Rufret bounded in pursuit. Soon a jumble of gray stone loomed before them. Adarr flipped his visor down and gripped his lance as tightly as his numb fingers allowed. Just ahead, the trail of the beast disappeared around the outcrop. Adarr exchanged a grim look with Rufret. There was no need to tell the hound to proceed carefully. Adarr lowered his lance. Together, the two slowly rounded the spur of rock and peered into the hollow beyond.

There was nothing within. At least, nothing alive, Adarr corrected himself. Blood spattered the snowy floor of the hollow, and bits of splintered bone and scraps of hide were scattered about. Amid the gore, a flash of color caught his eye. Something fluttered atop a dark mound. "What is that?" he wondered aloud.

Rufret wrinkled his nose in disgust. "By the smell of it, I'd say it's mysterious beast droppings."

Adarr scowled at the dog. "I know that, Rufret. I was referring to *this*." He lowered his lance and, with the tip, pointed to the object. It was almost as if a tattered shred of fine cloth had been dropped upon the beast's spoor.

"Hand me that scrap of cloth, Rufret."

The dog fixed him with a piercing look. "In case you hadn't noticed, I don't have hands."

"You know what I mean."

Rufret's ears drooped. "I was afraid of that." The dog stared at the fluttering tatter, sighed, then picked it up in his mouth. He raised it toward Adarr, who took it in a gauntleted hand. After this, Rufret made a show of spitting and licking snow. Adarr couldn't

understand the reason for this. Mundane dogs were always chewing on animal dung. He supposed it was simply an affectation.

Now that he examined the scrap closely, Adarr saw that it wasn't a piece of cloth at all. Rather, it was some sort of thin membrane, almost like the cast-off skin of a snake. Only it was far too large to have come from a serpent, and it shone with an uncanny, iridescent rainbow of colors. He was unsure just what the scrap portended, but it left him feeling vaguely unsettled all the same. He tucked it into a saddlebag.

The creature's trail led out of the far side of the hollow. Though there was less blood now—it was no longer carrying a dripping haunch of meat—the strange prints were easy to follow through the snowy fields.

"Come on," he told Rufret.

They were still half a league from the village of Redstone when Adarr realized that this had to be the beast's destination. From the rocky edge of the vale, the creature's path had made a great arc heading steadily inward. Redstone lay on the east side of the valley, opposite Foxdale, but was closer to the center. Adarr urged Ash into a gallop. Rufret ran behind.

They found Redstone in chaos.

Here the creature had come, not in the gray light before dawn, but under the midmorning sun. It had struck the edge of the hamlet, killing one sheep and snatching up another before stalking away. This time a number of the villagers had gotten glimpses of the beast. It was hard to sort through their excited and fearful talk. Most of their descriptions were both contradictory and fantastical. However, there was one fact that Adarr heard repeated time and again: the creature had walked on two legs.

"I don't think we're going to learn anything more here," Rufret said finally.

Adarr agreed. He assured the villagers that Queen Alisende would certainly hear their petitions for aid—though how she would manage to replace the lost sheep, he did not know.

They picked up the trail quickly. Once more the creature's path made a great arc, heading ever deeper toward the heart of the vale. This time it had paused to consume its meal beside a half-frozen stream. However, the trail did not continue on the other side. That meant the beast had followed the water.

"Which way do you think it went?" Rufret wondered. "Upstream or down?"

"Down," Adarr said with dread certainty. "Don't you see? It will make for Brookford now." Brookford was the largest of Felthinfar's villages. Though still cold, it was now mid afternoon, and the warmest part of the day. All of Brookford's folk would be out, performing their daily tasks. Following the banks of the stream, Adarr urged Ash on faster yet. The old destrier stretched its knobby legs valiantly while Rufret loped beside.

At last they passed between two hills and galloped down a muddy lane into the heart of Brookford.

Villagers looked up from their work in surprise at the sight of champion and seneschal. Adarr brought Ash to a skidding halt, frowning in puzzlement. Why were the villagers not cowering, as in Foxdale, or all in a stir, as in Redstone?

"Don't you see, Adarr?" Rufret said worriedly. "We were wrong. The beast didn't come here after all!"

With a sinking feeling, Adarr realized Rufret was right. But if the beast had not come here, then where had it gone? The creature had been moving in a great circle around the kingdom, spiraling ever inward, toward the center of the vale, toward...

Alarm swelled in his chest. "...toward the castle." He glanced at Rufret in dread. "Alisende is at the castle."

A heartbeat later, knight, horse, and dog raced across the snow-mantled valley. Adarr cursed his old and foolish mind. He could only hope he was not too late.

This time they were right. The listing turrets of the castle loomed in the near distance when they came upon the now-familiar tracks in the snow. They pressed on. However, perhaps a furlong from the castle's gate, the trail suddenly made a sharp turn to the left. They came to a halt.

"We're upwind of the beast," Rufret barked. "I think it has caught our scent. It knows it's being followed."

"But where is it going?" Adarr asked, clenching a gauntlet into a fist. "Someplace it can hide? Or someplace where it thinks it can lay in wait for us?"

"Maybe both," Rufret said, ears twitching.

Adarr followed the dog's gaze. The strange tracks led directly eastward, toward a tangled wall of winter-bare trees. The elfwood. A chill coursed down his back. You are a champion, Adaq not a villager, he reminded himself sternly. He reached up to touch the leaf-green gem clasped to his cloak, the gem Alisende had given him. As he did, he found his heart curiously strengthened. His fear did not vanish, yet it did recede some. Gripping the reins, he spurred Ash toward the forest. Rufret hesitated, then followed after.

Adarr brought Ash to a halt at the edge of the shadowed wood. The destrier stamped and snorted nervously. The dense forest was no place for a horse. Adarr cast down his lance and, with a groan of effort, swung one mail-clad leg over the saddle. He slid clumsily to the ground, landing with a bone-jarring jolt and a bright clattering of steel. He approached the forest wall.

"Do we have to go in?" Rufret whined.

"You do not," Adarr said.

He did not wait for Rufret's reply. Steeling his will, the knight stepped between two tall trees and plunged into the forest.

The air darkened, as if blue twilight had fallen. Leafless aspen trees, as pale and slender as ghosts, closed in. Dark branches wove a tangled web above, blotting out the sky. There was not a breath of wind.

Adarr nearly balked, but again he touched Alisende's token at his throat and found the will to continue on. He trudged through deep drifts of snow, toward the heart of the forest. The small hairs on the

back of his neck prickled. There was a power here, a presence, watching him. It did not seem malevolent. Yet it was queer, and ancient, and not altogether friendly. Somehow he sensed that it did not approve of the polished steel that clad his body, or the bright blade that swung at his hip.

His nose wrinkled as he caught a strange scent, at once musky and metallic. With a stiff yet graceful motion, Adarr drew the borrowed sword. The weapon glowed in the blue light, the flat of its blade traced with spidery runes. His heart beat swiftly in his chest, feeling light and papery, as if it might fly away at any moment. The dark omen of the broken sword crept into his mind and heart once more. He knew now, with perfect certainty, that the sign was true. An end awaited him in this forest. But he had his duty. Forcing himself to breathe, he pushed his way through a thicket of briars, his armor protecting his flesh from the cruel thorns. He found himself on the edge of a snowy clearing.

A rasping hiss shattered the brittle air. A sinuous neck uncoiled, and a wedge-shaped head turned to gaze at him with piercing sapphire eyes. Adarr gripped the smooth trunk of a tree to keep from staggering. It stood not twenty paces away, a mirror image to the creature portrayed so skillfully in the tapestry in the castle's Great Hall. Only this thing was forged of bone and sinew, not warp and weft. Its flesh was white as ice, where he could glimpse it beneath the jeweled scales. His knees shook inside his armor. Even were he not Champion, he would know this creature.

"Felthfin," he murmured in awe.

The wyrm hissed again, extending a blue, forked tongue, as if it knew its name. Blood flecked its hooked muzzle. Adarr should have known it was no ordinary creature that stalked the kingdom, if not by evidence then at least by instinct. Yet it had been five centuries since the wyrm Felthfin had last woken. Never had he believed it would crawl from its lair in his lifetime. Why now? he wondered. Why had it come in the winter of his life, when he was old, and gray, and weary? He gripped the sword in a trembling hand.

The wyrm stalked toward the knight. It moved, not as a lizard-clumsy and halting-as Adarr might have expected, but with the swift, precise grace of a bird. With every step of its crooked legs it rocked lithely from one side to the other, stretching its long neck forward. Small wings and barbed tail were thrust out for balance. Adarr had never before seen anything so terrifyingly beautiful. He stared at the approaching wyrm, hypnotized by the glittering gems that studded its scales. It was nearly too late when he remembered himself, and his peril.

The wyrm struck, neck lashing like a muscular whip, hooked beak open in a fell shriek. Adarr blinked, then swung his sword in a warding blow. Jarring pain ran up his arm, flaring in his shoulder. The blade clattered off the gem-encrusted scales of the wyrm's neck. However, the strength of the blow was enough to alter the direction of the creature's strike. Adarr stumbled to the

side, avoiding the snapping mouth by inches.

Panting now, he raised his sword again. Felthfin regarded him with its cold gaze, cocking its head so far to one side it nearly turned upside down. The creature made a few lunges with its neck. Each time Adarr was too slow to meet them, and his sword whistled through thin air. But the wyrm was simply testing him, measuring its danger. It had faced countless champions in its long life, and it had grown canny over the centuries.

Adarr tried to recall what he knew of wyrms. Never had he thought he would live to see this day. Yet he was Champion, and this was the destiny he had prepared for. He knew his sword would be useless against the creature's scales. The eyes were a weak spot, but they were small and difficult to strike. The only place he could hope to land a wounding blow was the beast's belly. A wyrm's underside was not protected by scales as was its back, and so was its one vulnerability. Adarr made a few feints of his own. However, always the creature kept its underside guarded, hunching over, head low before it. Adarr swore through his mustaches. Felthfin was too crafty to expose its soft belly to a champion with a sword.

When the real attack came, it was so swift Adarr hardly saw it. Balancing on one foot, the wyrm struck out with the other, batting Adarr's sword from his hand so forcefully that it took the gauntlet with it. Blade and metal glove landed a dozen paces away. Adarr cried out in pain, shaking his bare, stinging hand. Then the wyrm was upon him. It leaned its glittering body against his, sinuous neck wrapping around his shoulders, bearing him downward with its weight. Adarr stiffened, trying to resist. He clenched his jaw. His boots sank deep into the snow. It felt as if his knees were being ground to splinters.

At last the thing's bulk was too much. Adarr fell sprawling on his back, the wyrm atop him. It let out a shriek of exultation, striking at him with a clawed foot. Long talons punched through his breastplate as if it were parchment, tearing three long gouges in the hard steel. It bent its head down, until its flickering tongue brushed against his steel visor, as if tasting it. Desperate, Adarr balled his left hand into a fist. With all his might, he plunged the steel-clad fist into the beast's mouth, raking the back of its throat. The wyrm hissed, jumping back in surprise and indignation.

Gritting his teeth against the throbbing pain in his shoulders and knees, Adarr crawled through the snow toward his sword. His bare fingers closed around the freezing hilt. He rolled over, thrusting the blade before him just as the wyrm prepared to pounce. It screeched in rage, taking a step backward, doubling over itself. Yet for a moment Adarr had seen a flash of pale flesh beneath.

With painful effort, Adarr pulled himself to his feet. Felthfin circled around him, searching for an opening. Adarr tracked it with his sword. The wyrm cocked its neck back, then struck. The knight swung clumsily and lurched out of reach. It struck again, and again. Each time Adarr parried barely in time to avoid the strike.

The wyrm was trying to tire him. And it was working. His lungs burned; brilliant sparks danced before his aged eyes.

The wyrm spread its wings and craned its neck, now coming at Adarr from the side. The warrior tried to turn to face the blow. That was when he felt it. With a warm rushing, something gave way deep in his chest. He staggered as bright sparks of pain streaked down his left arm. The exertion of the battle had been, at last, too much. His heart had been true, but it had proved too weak. Gasping for breath, Adarr fell to his trembling knees.

Felthfin did not hesitate. The wyrm struck from behind. It clamped its beaklike jaws onto his left shoulder. Steel armor crumpled like dry leaves. Flesh and bone ground together. Adarr threw his head back, screaming as red agony exploded in his shoulder. It might well be a mortal wound, but it did not matter. His heart would fail him first. The sign of the broken sword had come to pass. The wyrm released its hold, and Adarr pitched forward into the snow. A shadow fell over him. Somehow, groaning, he rolled over. A weight pressed against his chest. The wyrm stood above him, one clawed foot resting on Adarr's breastplate, pinning him to the ground. Ancient the creature was, as ancient as the land itself, and as immutable. Felthfin of Orillion.

The wyrm drew back its head. Adarr stiffened, awaiting the finishing blow. At least it would end the pain in his chest, he thought with a rueful grimace.

Shadows stirred among the trees just behind the wyrm. Adarr blinked. When had he and the creature come so close to the edge of the clearing? Something tingled against his throat. At the same moment, branches reached out of the forest. Only they weren't branches at all. They were arms, yet slender and graceful as branches, and as pale as snow. The wyrm hissed in surprise as countless twig-fingers brushed its jeweled scales. White arms coiled around its body, like a year's growth of a tree glimpsed in a heartbeat.

Felthfin opened its maw in a terrifying cry, flapping its wings as it tried to break free. It was to no avail. The arms bound the wyrm with the strength of deep-delving roots. Adarr gazed in wonder at the slender shapes hovering behind the creature. As tall as trees they were, clad in frosty gossamer, eyes as clear and cold as ice, yet lit with a green-gold light, like a reflection of the summer to come. Somehow he knew that, when the aspens were clad in silver and emerald, so too would be these ghostly beings.

Felthfin shrieked again. The branch-arms tightened, pulling the wyrm's head back, and back. Despite its furious struggling, it rose on its crooked legs, exposing an expanse of soft white flesh.

The wyrm's belly.

Adarr drew in a shallow breath. His frozen right hand still clasped his sword. Perhaps he could do this one thing before he died, and so make his end worthwhile. Despite the agony in his chest, he forced his arm to move, raising the blade out of the snow. With

all that remained of his strength he swung the sword, smiting the wyrm's soft underside.

It was a feeble blow. A child could have done far better. Adarr was so tired, and so cold. The sword tumbled from his hand, sinking into the snow. For a moment he thought his blow had done the wyrm no harm at all. Then, as round and bright as a holly berry, a single drop of blood welled forth from the wyrm's breast. The creature screamed, not in hurt, but in ancient fury. Wounded, however slightly, a wyrm must return to its lair to sleep. Such was the pact forged between champion and creature long ago. The thin fingers released their grip. The slender arms uncoiled. For a moment a brilliance hung on the air, like sunlight through icicles. It seemed to Adarr like the light of strange smiles. Then the pale forms vanished into the trees from which they had come.

Again the wyrm cried out in its trumpeting voice, raising its head, and Adarr thought it meant to strike him a final blow. Instead, the lone drop of crimson blood fell from the creature's breast. A pinpoint of warmth touched Adarr's bare, icy hand. Horror flooded through him. No! The wyrm's blood was to fall upon the soil, to renew the land. He tried to turn his hand over, to wipe the crimson droplet against the ground. Yet before he could move, the wyrm breathed upon him, and its breath was ice. At least I've died trying, Adarr thought faintly. Though I doubt that counts for much of anything. Then his frosted eyelids fluttered shut.

For a long time all was frozen darkness. Then, like a silvery flute, a voice.

"No, Rufret! Look at his chest. He's breathing. He is alive!"

"Well, I'll be a mundane mutt!"

It seemed the hardest thing he had ever done in his life, but at last Adarr opened his eyes, peering through the slit in his visor. The lifeless aspen trees hovered around the glade's edges like the ghost of a wintry cathedral. He could not feel the warmth of her touch through the hard frosted steel of his breastplate. So cold he was... yet not just cold. Strange, as well. Light. As if the snow was a colorless sea upon which he effortlessly drifted.

He opened his mouth, managed to whisper the hoarse words. "I have failed you, Alisende. The wyrm is wounded, but its blood fell not upon the ground. There is no hope for Felthfinfar now." Tears welled in his eyes, but they turned to ice before they could fall. "I am sorry."

Wondrously, a smile touched her lips. Somewhere amid the white, she had found a sprig of green. She had scattered the leaves around, and their sweet, pungent fragrance filled his lungs. She seemed not to notice the snow drifting into the folds of her gown of robin's breast red.

"My, sweet, silly knight," Alisende laughed. "Don't you see? You could never fail me."

She raised a glittering object in her hand.

"It's a dragon scale!" Rufret barked, his fluffy tail

wagging wildly. "It's worth a king's ransom. A dozen king's ransoms. We're rich, Adarr! Rich!"

Adarr stared at the jewel-encrusted scale in wonder. Alisende's smile deepened. "It matters not where Felthfin's blood fell," she murmured. "You have saved the kingdom, my Champion." She lifted the visor of his helm, to bestow upon her servant a kiss of thanks.

As one, Alisende and Rufret gasped.

"What is it?" Adarr asked in dread. Was his the gray, gaunt visage of a dying man?

With trembling hands, Alisende held up his sword. A reflection gazed back at him from the polished flat of the blade: a handsome man of no more than five and twenty, with mustaches of jet black and eyes of sky blue. It was a face Adarr had not seen in fifty years. A face that, once, had been his own. But how? Then he knew. The dragon's blood renews the land. Only Felthfin's blood had not fallen upon the ground.

Tears streamed down Alisende's face, but they were tears of wonder. Rufret yipped wildly, running in circles and chasing his own tail. Adarr stood and found himself whole and hale. He reached out to take Alisende's hand in his own, now smooth and strong, yet trembling still.

"My Queen..."

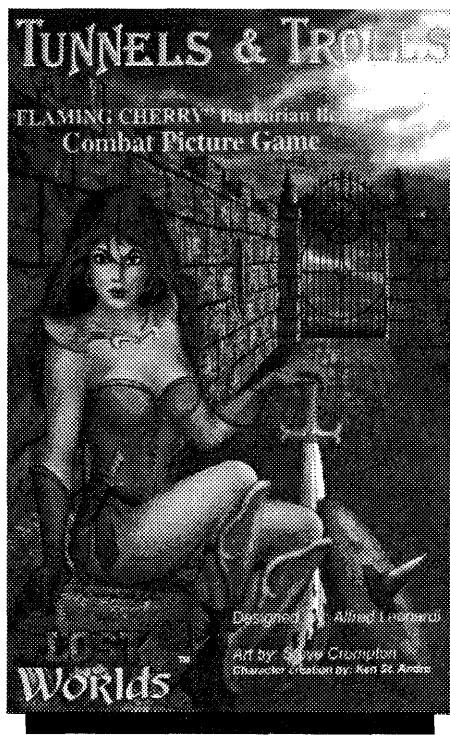


They were married on the first day of spring, in the courtyard of the castle, with blue banners flying from the turrets. All of Felthfinfar's folk were in attendance, and Rufret performed the ceremony. Adarr wore his armor, now restored to shining brilliance, while Alisende was clad in a gown as green as spring, the elf-stone of the forest shining on her breast. Felthfinfar might ever be the least of Orillion's kingdoms, but on that day, and for countless days after, it was also the most joyous.

Afterward some said that, during the wedding, a grove of pale trees somehow appeared before the castle gate, and vanished again just as mysteriously. But this did not surprise Adarr. For, he thought as he gazed at the green jewel on her gown, he knew now how his queen had worked her magic all these years. Hand in hand, Queen and Champion walked into their castle, new memories to weave, while in the forest, like gems of green themselves, the first leaves were just beginning to unfurl.

The End

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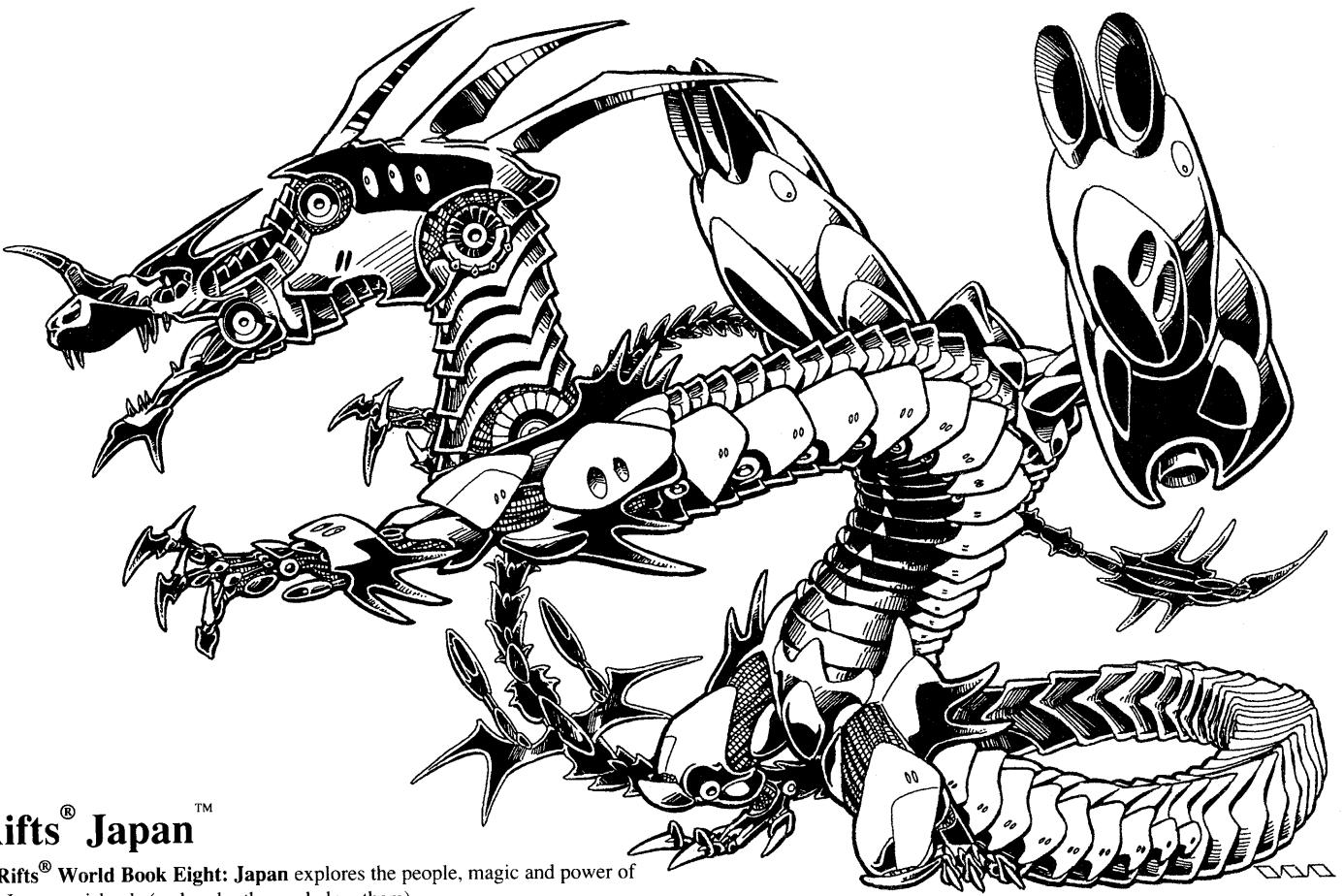


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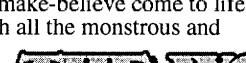
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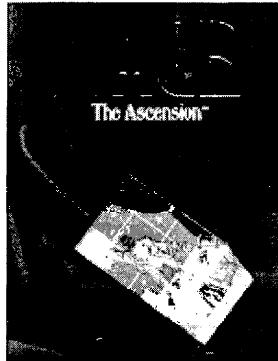
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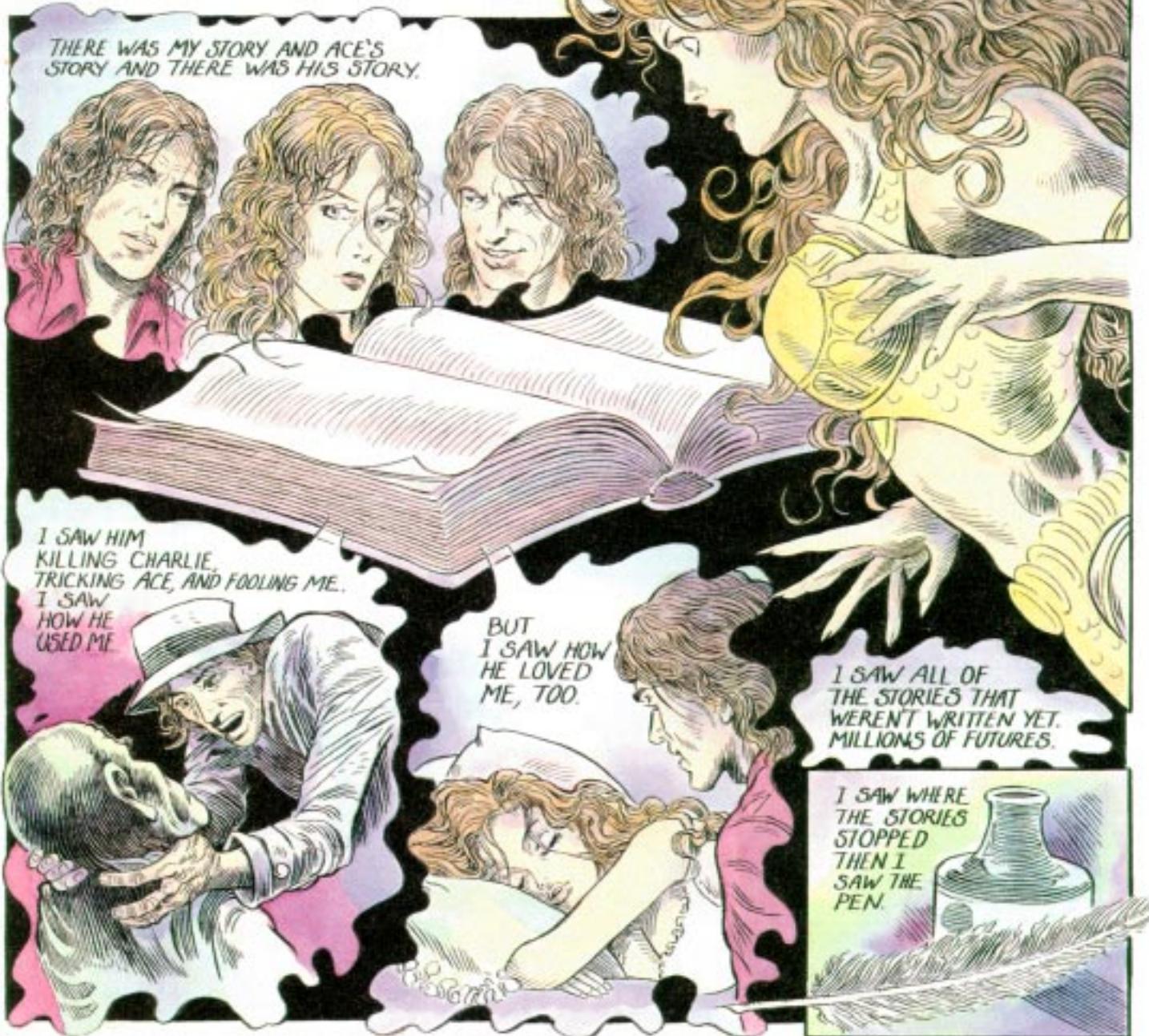


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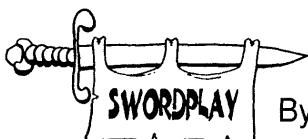
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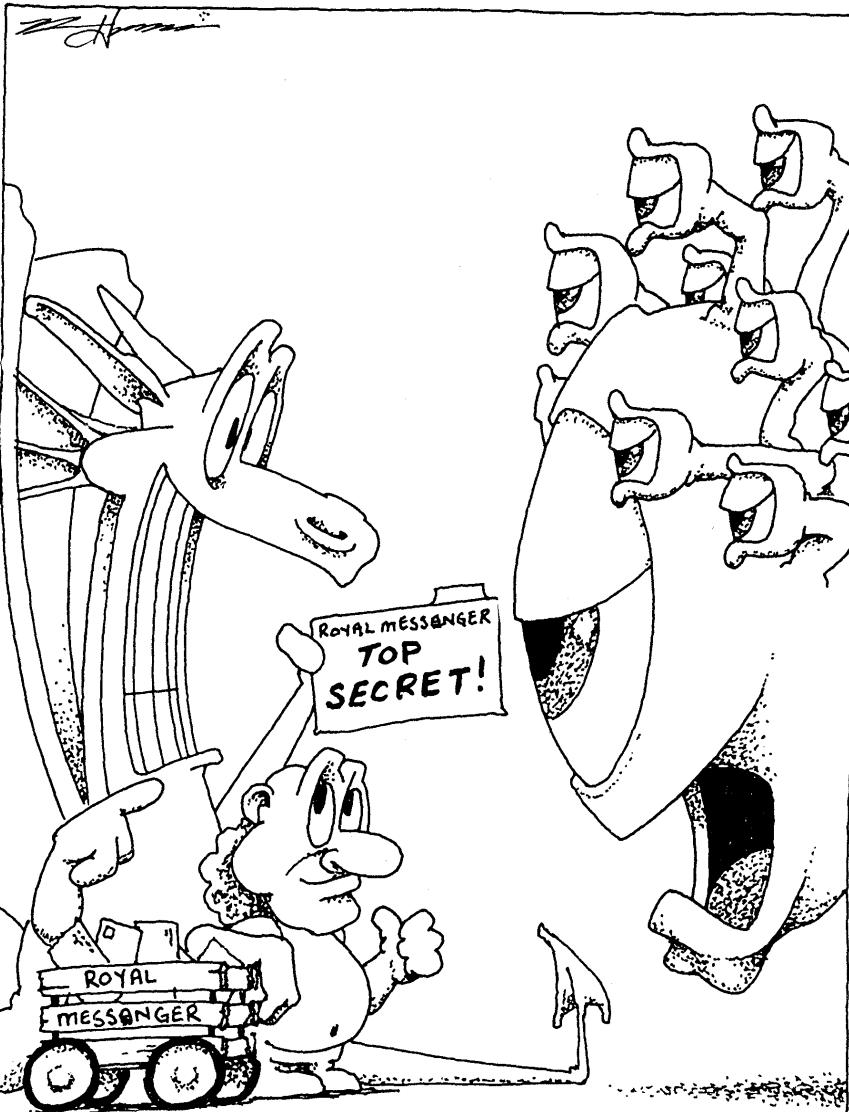
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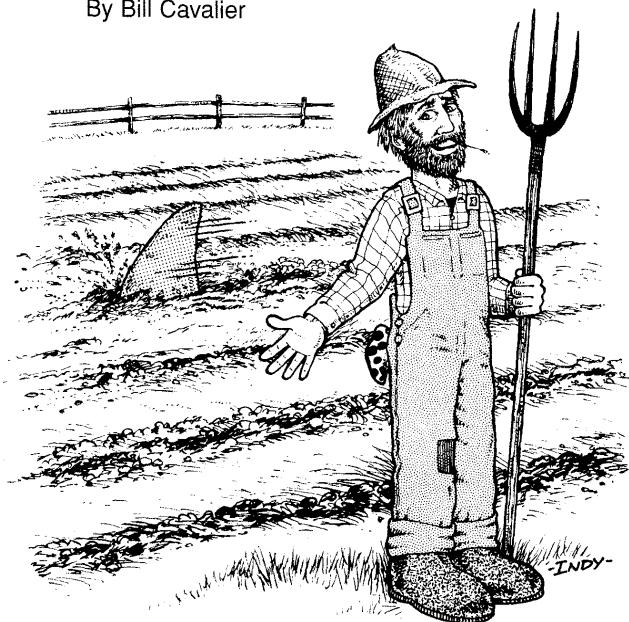


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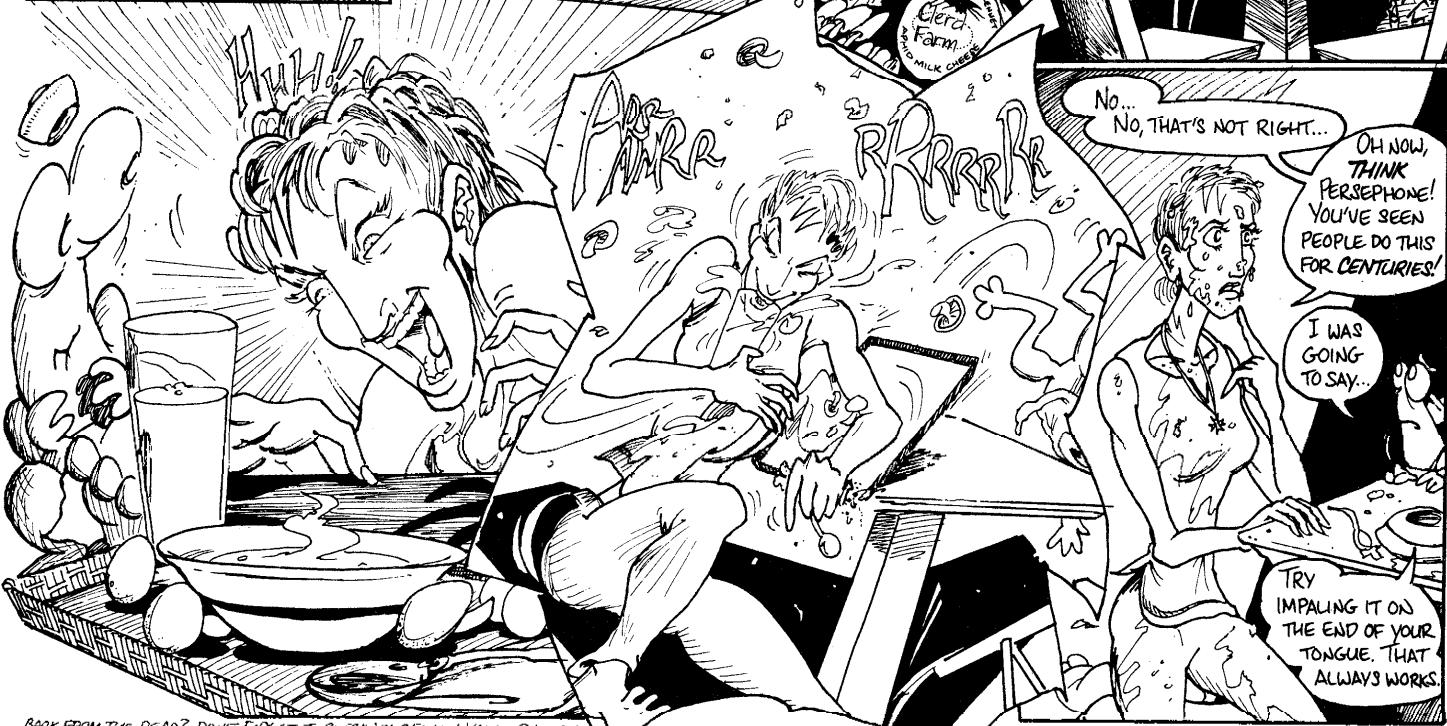
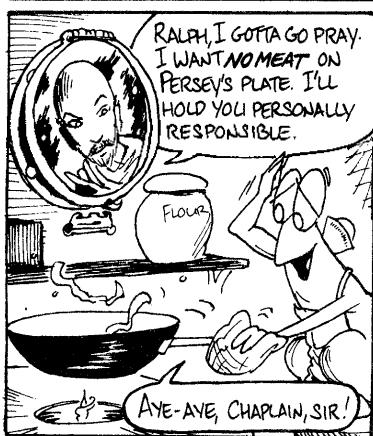
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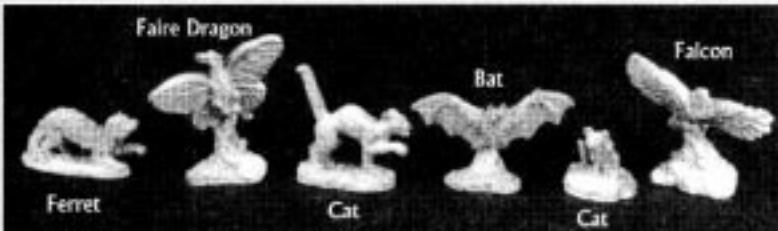
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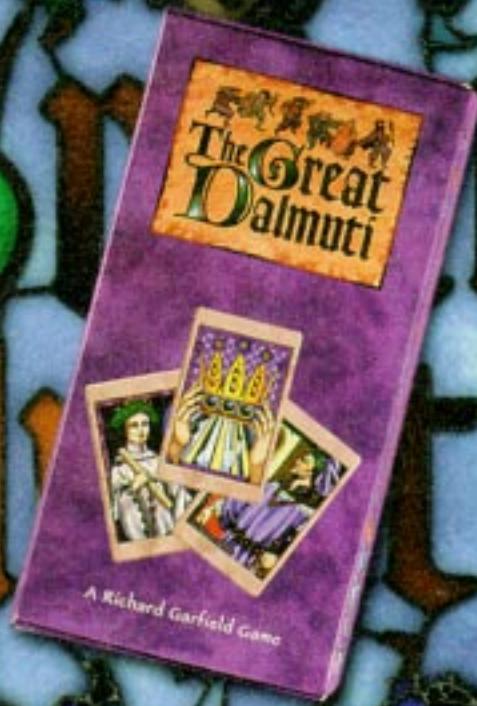
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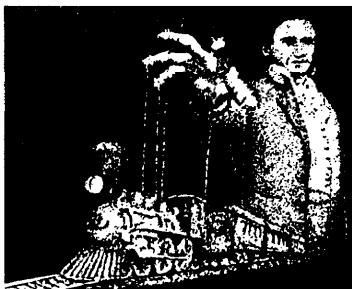
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An Interview with the DRAGONLANCE® team: M*argaret* W*eis* *T*^{and} T*racy* H*ickman*

by Sue Weinlein

Trips to the bookstore are tough on readers of fantasy. A quick scan of the shelves these days reveals more dragons, sorcerers, and heroic warriors than ever before. How can we choose?

To make the decision even tougher, the number of new fantasy releases grows faster than the genre's section in stores. There's a kind of natural selection happening on those shelves right before our eyes, a literary Survival of the Fittest. Even devoted fans can't keep up with all the new fantasy realms being born-births that force other worlds to vanish quietly into the mists of book-lore.

What's the secret that makes a book whisper enchantingly to readers, compelling them to pick it off the shelf and fall, enraptured, into its world of legend and romance? Is it magic?

If it is, then authors Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman are true wizards. Their best-selling DRAGONLANCE® Chronicles trilogy has sold two million copies and has blossomed into a saga of more than 50 books featuring visionary storytelling, sympathetic and entertaining heroes, and epic struggles between Good and Evil. The Dragonlance world of Krynn has been like a fantasy home to millions of readers for more than 10 years.

It's home to the authors too. "Margaret and I over the years have occasionally

come to live in Krynn," says Hickman. "It was nice to come home," agrees Weis.

There Goes the Neighborhood

On their last visit "home," the authors made a few changes. Readers can check out the neighborhood themselves this month in *Dragons of Summer Flame*, Weis and Hickman's long-awaited sequel to the Chronicles trilogy. To create Krynn's new look, the authors didn't just put up new wallpaper and curtains. Oh, no.

We're talking major demolition here.

Dragons of Summer Flame opens some 25 years after the War of the Lance, covered in the Chronicles trilogy, with the evil Knights of Takhisis planning their invasion of the continent Ansalon. Where the story goes from there will shock even the boldest speculators.

It all started in February, 1994, when Hickman flew out from Arizona to Wisconsin for a story conference with Weis. They spent the entire day at The Barn (Weis's renovated home) determining the destiny of their heroes and the world they'd created.

"Our first desire," says Hickman, "was to bring back that vision we originally had, to provide the scope and the depth we'd always had."

This novel wasn't as hard to plot as

some have been. "The plot's been brewing for well over 10 years," Hickman said. He and Weis actually laid quite a bit of groundwork for *Dragons of Summer Flame* in previous novellas about Steel Brightblade and the other children of the Companions (collected in *The Second Generation* anthology).

"Going into it," Hickman says, "we didn't necessarily have a clear vision of where the story is going. I don't think we're ever sure who's in charge: whether we're writing the story or whether it just goes where it goes."

"For example," Weis continues, "we knew the whole side story of Kitiara and Sturm and how they had a son. Once we had that, the rest of it sort of fell into place."

They acknowledge that how the pieces fell has upset some readers. To begin with, editors published the first three chapters of *Dragons of Summer Flame* as a sneak preview in the paperback release of *The Second Generation* this past February. In the first chapter, we see that Tanin and Sturm Majere have fallen in battle with the knights of Takhisis. "Everyone seems really upset that Palin's two brothers died," Weis says.

Hickman continues. "We have no shyness whatsoever about killing off a character." DRAGONLANCE novels confront death

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Fangthane Bloodjaw looked out over the factory grounds at the sad little pack of Garou who thought they were penetrating the security undetected. He smiled a split-gummed grin. Kills-the-Weak placed a hand on Fangthane's shoulder, careful to avoid the cancerous boils there, and burst out laughing as the factory's defense fomori burst from their shallow graves beneath the edge of the reactor and began to burn the Garou with their radioactive, acid touch. Oh, yes. This would be a glorious night for the Wyrm indeed.

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rather than shy away from it, he says. "Death and risk are an essential part of adventure."

Though the fourth Chronicles volume does drastically change the world of Krynn, readers will be glad to know that it doesn't close the book on the Saga.

"*Dragons of Summer Flame* for me closes the book on the Krynn that was," Hickman says, "while at the same time opens the book on a whole new set of challenges for this world."

The authors plan to explore the experiences of other key characters during the same time period as the new novel. Says Weis, "The event that occurs in *Dragons of Summer Flame* is such a cataclysmic and gigantic event that there are a lot of other stories that need to be done."

The Players

The authors promise that readers will meet all their favorite characters in *Dragons of Summer Flame*. The main players are Palin Majere and Steel Brightblade, but Tanis Half-Elven figures prominently as well because, as Weis points out, they never felt Tanis's story had been fully told.

Of course, there's also Tasselhoff. "We could never write a book about Krynn without Tas," Weis says. "He is incredibly

important to this story."

And about a certain powerful mage...

"We just had to answer everyone's questions about Raistlin," Weis says. She warns readers not to expect him to be his old self. She hints that the mage's experiences in the Abyss have changed him, but she won't say how; just that it's "not any way you'd expect."

Fans have been enjoying a great deal of excited speculation about the changes to the great wizard, she says, but so far, "no one's been right yet."

Readers will also become acquainted with some members of the Thieves Guild and representatives of the Ilda community-cousins of the ancient ogres and the most powerful users of magic on Krynn. Finally, the book's heroine is a new character: "a woman who may or may not be Raistlin's daughter," says Weis.

Both authors agree that it was easy to get back into the swing of writing the DRAGONLANCE characters again. Hickman says he gains his inspiration from a Larry Elmore painting of the Heroes of the Lance sitting around a campfire; a painting that Elmore sold him "in a weak moment. That original hangs over my desk. So, every day I get to lean back in my chair and gaze up at that portrait. It's a family portrait for me."

Again, Krynn just feels like home. "It's a

place we can never forget," Hickman says. "It's the place where we began, where Weis and Hickman were born. It's been more than just a job over the years."

Weis and Hickman

Over those years, Weis and Hickman have worked together not only on the DRAGONLANCE Chronicles trilogy and *The Second Generation*, but also on the Legends trilogy and pieces for the collections *Leaves from the Inn of the Last Home* and *The History of DRAGONLANCE*. Their popular *Deathgate Cycle*, published by Bantam Spectra, has now reached seven volumes.

Over the years, the two haven't altered the way they work very much, despite Hickman's move to Arizona in 1990. They always get together to work out the plot of a book. "Margaret usually likes to start at the beginning of a story," says Hickman. "I usually like to start at the end."

As soon as they manage to find each other somewhere in the middle, Weis begins writing, sending Hickman chapters as she finishes them for his review and comment. Then there are a lot of phone calls back and forth. "The great thing about the modern age," says Hickman, "is that communication is at the point where this kind of thing can happen. When need

DRAGONLANCE HIGHLIGHTS

1984-

- The Saga was conceived and first published as a series of role-playing game adventures. *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* originally was to encompass the events in the first four adventures, but authors Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman discovered that it took a lot more space to tell a story in a narrative than in a role-playing game format. Ultimately, the first volume of Chronicles covered the plots of only the first two adventures.
- *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, TSR's first published novel, is known by many titles all over the world. Some of them include *Draghi del Crepuscolo d'Autunno* (Italian), *El Retorno de los Dragones* (Spanish), *Drachen Zwellight* (German), *De forst tegn* (Danish), and *Az Oszi Alkony Sarkanyai* (Hungarian).

1985-

- Terry Phillips, author of Raistlin's adventure in the Tower of High Sorcery (told in the AD&D® Endless Quest book *The Soulforge*), was the player of Raistlin in the games Tracy Hickman ran while DRAGONLANCE was still in development.

In the module *Dragons of Light*, Jeff Grubb invented the tinker gnomes to satirize his engineering background. That same year, in DRAGON® Magazine Roger E. Moore wrote of their discovery of radioactivity and their tinkering with nuclear power.

1986-

- *Dragons of Glory*, a strategic wargame DRAGONLANCE fans a chance to command the armies of Krynn.

1997-

- *Leaves from the Inn of the Last Home*, containing songs, poems, stories, and recipes from and about the Heroes of the Lance, proves more popular than its limited print run could allow. It was reprinted in 1994.

1988-

- The most common questions fans ask: Is Raistlin really dead, what ever happened to Gilthana and Silvara, and why did you kill Sturm?

1989-

- Although it's been established that Krynn is home to neither halflings nor orcs, both snuck

into print. *Kendermore* features an antagonist revealed as a half-orc. A few years later (1992) TSR Collector Cards will describe DRAGONLANCE halflings.

- Tinker gnomes in space! *KrynnSpace*, a SPELLJAMMER® accessory by Jean Rabe, gives Krynn its place in the stars.

1999-

- To get a better handle on Flint Fireforge's character while writing *Flint, the King*, author Mary Kirchoff imagined him as a cross between Yosemite Sam and actor Wilfred Brimley.

1991-

- The DRAGONLANCE book line begins to determine the path of the game design, rather than the other way around.
- Lord Soth makes his way out of Krynn and into the RAVENLOFT® campaign setting.

1992-

- In addition to a few halflings appearing where none should be in Krynn in TSR Collector Card series, other famous DRAGONLANCE characters appear as well-but with totally different histories. Editors immediately claim that these cards represent people named by their parents after great heroes due to their likenesses.

1993-

- Doug Niles, longtime player of Flint in the DRAGONLANCE readers' theater (don't ask), writes the Dwarven Kingdoms game accessory.

1994-

- Jeff Grubb, asked to write a novel about Lord Toede, replies, "You know, he's dead." He's told, "Yes: can you work with it?" The resultant novel owes a great deal to the unlikely pairing of a Sylvester and Tweety-bird cartoon and the Biblical story of Job.
- The PLANESCAPE® Campaign Setting matches the gods of Krynn's pantheon with the planes on which they live.
- The 1994 DRAGONLANCE booster pack of the SPELLFIRE™ collectible card game puts faces with names in some new ways. A picture of Caramon appears on the front of Lord Gunthar's card, for example. Ironically enough, the figure on the "Solamnic Knights" card is Steel Brightblade, a Knight of Takhisis.

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be, an airplane call take me to Margaret in just a few hours."

Both partners think their work benefits from the partnership. Says Hickman, "I've come to believe that Margaret and I together are greater than the sum of our parts."

A World for Us All

Weis and Hickman have created a setting that feels real to readers. "DRAGONLANCE has pretty much taken on a life of its own," Hickman says, adding that, when writing, they often feel like "we're chronicling history. That is the life we impart to the world and to a certain extent it's the life the worldwide readership imparts to it."

Worldwide is right. Currently the DRAGONLANCE novels are published in 13 languages. The two regularly receive fan mail from Australia, Russia, and Israel. They also receive international e-mail (addressed to the Internet newsgroup alt.fan.dragonlance). "Being on the Internet, we just talk to people from all over," Weis says.

What is it about the DRAGONLANCE Saga that speaks to such a varied readership? How can Krynn stand strong year after year while so many other fantasy worlds fall in the battle for bookstores' shelf space?

"It's a world in which people feel very comfortable," Weis explains. "As Tracy says, we live there, and I think a lot of people live there."

The key is that readers can relate to the characters, who Weis describes as "ordinary people caught up in extraordinary situations. People feel like, if they walked out of their house one day and were

transported to Krynn, they could meet Tanis and carry on a conversation with him."

Hickman says he sees the DRAGONLANCE Saga as "a cooperative union with the fans." Authors can only put so much on the page; it's the readers' imagination that provides the rest of the vision. This vision "gives life to the story. The reader is an active participant and really makes the story come alive."

Fans help shape this world at another level as well. For instance, the authors incorporated into *Dragons of Summer Flame* a very memorable magical item conceived at the GENCON® Game Fair about five years ago. Each year at the convention, the authors host a game tournament called the Killer Breakfast. The goal of the game? The event's name says it all: Only the very brave—or the very entertaining—survive the adventure. "We kill about 250 characters every year," Hickman says.

One player character, venturing into a Tower of High Sorcery, encountered a horrible undead creature. This resourceful kender reached into his pocket and pulled out a spoon, brazenly announcing that it was the dreaded Kender Spoon of Turning. "Much to my chagrin," recalls Hickman, "when I rolled the die, it was!" The character survived, and a piece of Krynn lore was born.

DRAGONLANCE: The Role-playing Game

Role-playing has always gone hand-in-hand with novels in the Saga. The first series of 12 DRAGONLANCE adventure modules paralleled the Chronicles trilogy. It

only seems right that the outcome of *Dragons of Summer Flame* has inspired a new DRAGONLANCE game, due out from TSR, Inc. in August, 1996.

The authors are excited about the game possibilities the book's outcome presents for player characters. "One of the most interesting elements," says Weis. "Is that they're going to have to go searching for magic." Not to give away too much (you have to read the book, after all), Tasslehoff discovers how magic will have to work differently on post- *Summer Flame Krynn*.

Do the authors have any ideas for the game's designers?

Hickman stresses that the goal of the first DRAGONLANCE modules was to tell stories in an adventure setting, a goal he thinks should still hold true today. "[Game designers should] tell stories in DRAGONLANCE," he says, "rather than just plot adventures." Weis suggests that people remember the importance of good and evil in the DRAGONLANCE Saga, and present characters with ethical dilemmas, "so that people learn a little something about themselves."

"Dragonlance has always been to me a grand-scale vision," Hickman says. "I see it in wide-screen grand vista imagery. My advice would be not to think too small. Make it expansive, make it large." 

Right Monster Continued from page 86

several times, eventually all but destroying their masters' civilization. They are not only good monsters in their own right, but can also be logical precursors for even greater horrors. After all, since the Old Ones favor genetic engineering so much, why wouldn't they design even more terrible monsters as a counter to the shoggoths? A good adventure would be for the investigators to accompany and try to stop the Starkweather-Moore Expedition mentioned by Lovecraft in "At the Mountains of Madness," or at least clean up the mess afterwards, when the shoggoths are provoked into launching a new wave of invasions. But perhaps there really aren't any shoggoths on Earth; would Abdul Alhazred lie?

Star-Spawn of Cthulhu: These creatures are second only to dholes and (possibly)

chthonians as potential Godzillas in the campaign. Aside from their obvious potential in party-killing, and alien vs. alien warfare (as mentioned above)—consider the possibility of a gruesome scam. Unless the investigators have earned a lot of knowledge in the Cthulhu Mythos skill, they may not know that Cthulhu is 400' high. Thus, anyone running into one of the Star-Spawn may well think he is facing Cthulhu himself, and react accordingly. This sort of thing has the potential to cause parties to do everything from misidentify clues to running away from a lesser-albeit still terrible-opponent under the impression that he is a Great Old One. If the investigators face several at once, don't be surprised if someone blurts out, "Cthulhu can even clone himself!"

Star Vampires: Like fire vampires, these invisible, nightmarish entities are generally encountered only when some occultist has summoned them to attack the party or an

ally of theirs, or to guard a particular site. Their ability to move and attack unseen will raise the level of tension among a party to almost unbearable levels.

Xicotlans: These giant alien servants of the shans may, under some circumstances, be mistaken for trees, as is the case with the Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath. (They may substitute for them in the *Macbeth* scenario mentioned earlier.) Unless the investigators find a gate that leads to Xicotl, however, they will never be found in an adventure unless the shans are also present. They are the muscle to back up the shans' mind-control activities, and any party that successfully resists the latter can expect a good old-fashioned physical assault by the Xicotlans sometime in the near future. 

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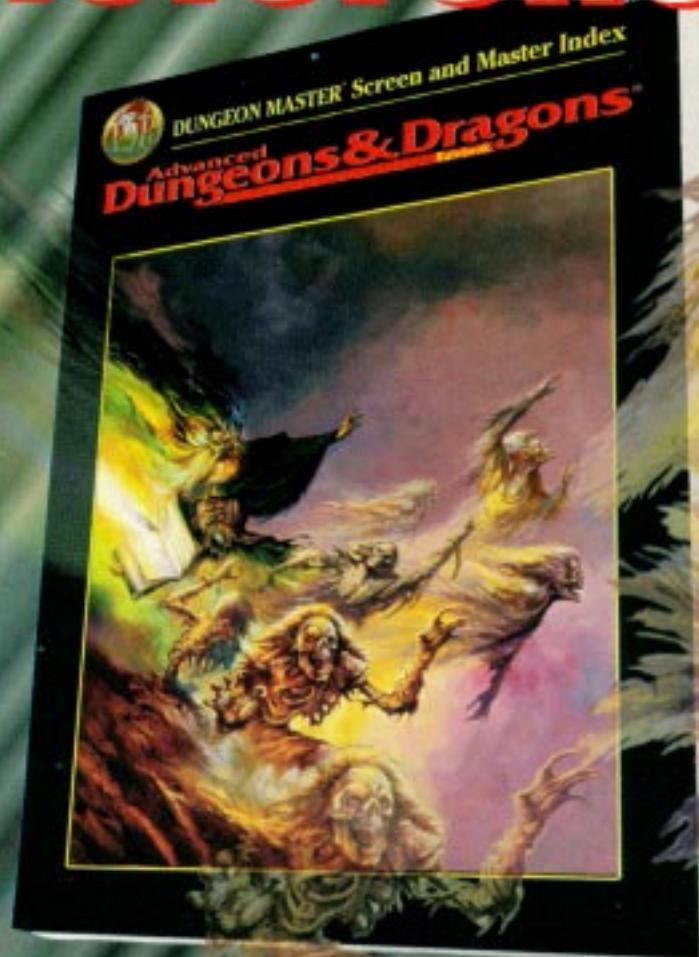
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